

Death's Song, Life's Silence

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Death's Song, Life's Silence

by [Rosenfree](#)

Summary

Wilbur couldn't believe it when he began to feel sorry for this dragon.

Dragons had murdered his people. They had ripped his own family away from him. They had caused years upon years of suffering to those before him, and it had only gotten worse for those in front of him now. And yet...he felt sorry for one of them.

Or, in which Wilbur has several crises as he deals with the burden of being the next chief, having a younger brother figure that attracts problems, losing half of his family, and oh, maybe training a couple dragons along the way. (A self-indulgent HTTYD AU)

Notes

I have started a new AU :o

I am very excited to have fun with this one, and I hope you all enjoy!

So pull up a chair, maybe grab some blankets, perhaps even brew yourself a warm beverage, and enjoy!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Wilbur is not special. He knows this; he's been told it so very many times by those who knew his brother.

But *come on*, the way he just beheaded this Nadder and saved a mother with her child had to count for *something*, right?

“*Wilbur!*”

He turned his head away from the dead dragon to see his father running at him, carrying a bucket of water in one hand and a double-headed axe in the other. The chief threw the axe Wilbur's way, then turned to put out a fire beside him.

Wilbur dropped his bloodied sword and caught the axe just in time to swipe at a Gronkle carrying away some livestock. His slash was just a bit too short, and he glared at the stocky dragon as it flew away, unharmed, with the sheep.

Chief Philza shoved past him to throw another axe at the dragon, hitting it squarely in the back. He turned to his son as the dragon bellowed and fell from the sky. “Go find Tommy.”

“But I—”

“*Go. Find. Tommy.*”

Wilbur resisted the urge to roll his eyes and nodded. His father gave him a brief approving nod in return before directing his attention to the defensive mother and her babe. She had a mace at the ready that she put down in relief as the chief checked her over for any injuries.

Wilbur twitched at the clear dismissal, but he hefted the axe onto his shoulder and dashed off to find the child.

The village was in chaos, huge pillars of flames devouring old barns and homes alike, screaming Vikings sacrificing themselves for the village around every bend, and so, so many dragons. Nightmarish creatures that had nothing but evil in their serpentine eyes were on almost every building, screeching and shooting jets of fire out of their mouths. None of the buildings were meant to support a dragon's weight, let alone several, so the roofs were giving out as the dragons shifted on top of the houses.

A cluster of Nadders were raiding the storehouse, stealing barrels of fish and setting whatever remained on fire. A Monstrous Nightmare flew overhead, spouting liquid fire onto the ground as it passed by.

How his father thought Wilbur could find a single person in this disaster was beyond him.

At that moment, a young Viking ran past Wilbur. The youth hid behind him as a Gronkle lumbered towards them, its gaze dead set on the shaking kid.

“Tommy...”

“Ayup, Wilbur. While I’d love to get lectured by you for the sixteenth time this week, there is a *fucking dragon* here to kill me.”

Wilbur sighed. “You are getting a *talk* when I’m done with this fat lizard.”

The two ducked as the Gronkle spat a fireball at them, coming so close that Wilbur swore the tips of his hair were singed. Wilbur stood and threw his axe at the stocky beast, the weapon making a thick crunching sound as it landed directly between its eyes.

Wilbur didn’t bother watching the dragon die; instead he grabbed Tommy by the fur lining of his cloak and dragged him away.

The young Viking didn’t even squirm, just weakly protested as he was pulled away from the battle. “Wilbur, I was *joking* about the lecture, I’d rather have been eaten by that boulder with wings than have to listen to your whiny voice—”

“Tommy, don’t make me shove you back in there without a weapon.”

“You wouldn’t.”

“I would.”

Tommy fell silent at that, crossing his arms with a huff and shrugging off Wilbur’s grip. He walked alongside the man, staring at the ground like it was the most interesting part of the ongoing raid.

Wilbur resisted the urge to sigh again. Tommy meant the world to him, he really did, but sometimes he was...a lot.

He’s not sure why he didn’t expect this. The Innits had been one of the fiercest families of warriors he’d ever known. They had been nearly as respected as the chief’s family back in their prime. Every member of the family had died in a majestic, fire-filled glory, sacrificing themselves for their village. Which left a young Tommy alone in the ashes.

Phil had taken the child in out of respect for the fallen family, saying it was only right that a family of equal status would take this child and raise him.

Wilbur’s convinced this was just a way for his father to replace his mother and Techno. After all, Tommy became an orphan the same day Phil became a widower.

Fifteen years later, the kid was a young upstart that seemed to be inseparable from trouble and chaos. He’d probably only joined the raid to try and pet a dragon for the hell of it. The boy had an unhealthy... *fascination*, as Wilbur delicately put it, with the creatures that had terrorized their island in the middle of desolate seas for centuries. He thought they were *interesting*, not dangerous, or annoying, or absolutely terrifying.

Wilbur couldn't understand it, not that he had really *tried* to. There were unspoken rules in this world, and one of them was to destroy those fire-breathing pests. But like with most rules, Tommy never followed that one.

A rasping squawk sounded above the brothers. Wilbur raised his hand to block out the rising sun, squinting above him to see the retreating fleet of dragons overhead. The village had finally managed to fight them off, but Wilbur noted with distaste that several of the reptiles were carrying plenty of barrels and sheep.

The sun rose over a village covered in ash, half of its homes destroyed and burned beyond recognition, littered with the bodies of dragons and villagers alike, and the atmosphere miserable at best.

Wilbur shook his head and continued leading Tommy up the mountain, trying not to think about how many lives the village had lost recently. The attacks were becoming almost monthly occurrences, meaning every month their small population was diminishing further and further.

Tommy was silent beside him, his gaze straying to the wrecked village below and turning more desolate as he saw all the destruction. He let out a deep breath, white vapour swirling around his face as he exhaled. He pulled his cloak tighter around himself, shivering as the chilled temperature dropped further as they ascended to their home.

The two young warriors stopped in front of a large wooden cabin that overlooked the rest of the island. A wooden carving reminiscent of a Monstrous Nightmare's head rested at the front of the house, frozen in an eternal roar. It was painted and carved quite skillfully. Phil repainted it nearly every year when the weather inevitably chipped away the colour. Each window was shuttered tightly, as it was far too cold to open them. Only on the warmest days of summer would the inside of their house see the sunlight.

Wilbur tiredly pushed open the door and let Tommy run in before letting himself in. The old home was warmer than any other place on the island, with several fireplaces scattered around the ground floor and thick yak hides covering the walls for insulation. "Warm" may be too kind of a word. The place was somewhat *comfortable*, which was more than what could be said about the rest of the island with its biting winds and lack of consistent sun.

Tommy warmed himself in front of the dying fire, still alight from when the family had left to fight the dragons last night. Wilbur let his outer cape sink to the floor as he threw a damp log onto the coals, sinking into a stiff chair and finally letting his eyes shut.

"Wilbur?"

Wilbur opened one eye to look at Tommy. "Hm?"

"This might be an...*unpopular* opinion, but I really don't think we're doing anything to those dragons out there."

"Oh, really? What could possibly make you think *that*?"

Tommy gave Wilbur a withering glance before moving closer to the fire. “Oh, I dunno... maybe the three dead villagers I saw.”

Wilbur sat up and rubbed the bridge of his nose. “I guarantee you there are more downed dragons than people down in the village.”

“And *I* guarantee that there will be more dragons coming next month, but *we* won’t have more villagers.”

Before Wilbur could reply to that...unfortunately very truthful response, Phil threw open the door.

Wilbur and Tommy wisely chose to stay silent as Phil stalked in, slamming the door shut so hard that the entire house shook. The chief sat in a chair across from Wilbur without bothering to take off any layers of fur, stabbing a sword into the floor beside him.

“Morning, Phil.”

“Tommy.”

Tommy paled. “Yeah?”

“What were you thinking?” Phil, thankfully, didn’t sound furious. Contrary to the venomous expression he was levelling at the fireplace, his voice was quiet.

Tommy looked relieved that he wasn’t being chewed out this early in the morning. “Well, there was this one dragon that was getting just a *bit* too close to our house. So, like the very brave, strong, incredible Viking I am, I bundled up and led it away from home.”

“And the house is unscathed.”

“The house is unscathed!” Tommy agreed, leaning against Phil’s chair. “I think I did exactly what I was supposed to do as a brave—”

“Reckless, more like,” Wilbur interjected.

“*Fuck* you. As a *brave*, smart, strong Viking,” Tommy finished, glaring at his surrogate brother. Wilbur shrugged and closed his eyes again, praying that he could catch a few minutes of rest before coming down to assist in the rebuilding of the village.

“You did well as a Viking. But as my *son*, I don’t want you to do any of that ever again.”

“Hey—” Tommy squawked, but Phil cut him off.

“Go get some rest, Tommy. We have a busy week ahead of us.”

Wilbur heard Tommy grumble some incoherent nonsense before walking away, the stairs creaking as he made his way up to his room. The only sound in the room was the crackling fire. Wilbur felt a light pat on his arm as his father left his seat. “Come down when you’re done resting.”

Wilbur, keeping his eyes shut, nodded. He felt a gust of freezing air hit his face as the door opened, signalling Phil's departure.

The door shut—softer than before, for sure—and Wilbur let himself get as comfortable as humanly possible on the rigid chair before letting himself drift off to sleep.

“Look out!”

Wilbur ducked as a net was tossed overhead. A pair of villagers waved and smiled apologetically as he passed. He waved as well, watching the men get back to working on clearing weighted nets from the village roads.

Even though the attack had been mere hours ago, the village was already under intensive rebuilding. The dragons had been moved from the heart of the village, leaving shallow pits where their bodies had fallen from atop buildings and the sky. A wagon carrying fresh lumber was being unloaded by a burned storehouse, several Vikings on the half-destroyed roof covering the gaping holes with thatching. The chief was standing in the village centre, his dragon scale cape flashing in the muted sunlight.

Phil caught sight of Wilbur making his way towards the centre and waved him over. Wilbur jogged over to where his father and an unusually hairless Viking were discussing.

Jack, the only bald Viking Wilbur had ever met, clapped him on the back as he joined them. “Saw that Nadder kill you made last night. Brilliant work, that was.”

“Thanks, Jack.”

Phil nodded in approval. “That it was. Jack was here telling me about your fighting. Well done.”

Wilbur smiled as he firmly shook his father's hand. “It was nothing, really. It looked like a runt.”

Phil waved off his modesty with a laugh. “Take the compliment, boy. Jack has some work for you to do. Go help him in the forge.”

“I mean, I could help rebuild—”

Phil took his wrist in one hand and turned it over so Wilbur could see how the man's forefinger and thumb easily touched. “There's thatch out there that's thicker than you. Go on, then.”

Wilbur tugged his hand out of his father's grip and narrowed his eyes. “Thanks, *Dad*.”

Phil just laughed and turned away to speak with some other villagers.

Jack led the chief's son to his forge, telling the man that they had at least fifteen weapons to replace, ten helmets to un-dent, and a fair few shields to replate. “Those dragons were vicious

as shit last night.”

“Yeah, it was wild.”

Jack hefted a pile of scrap metal onto one of the tables, sorting through the pieces to find some decent material to melt down. Wilbur started stoking the flames, letting his mind wander as Jack rambled on in the background.

The dragons *had* been uncharacteristically violent yesterday. In the past, they had only come a few times a year, stolen a yak or two, and *maybe* charred a house in the process. Only three or four would ever raid the island at a time. But now the dragons came more frequently than trade ships, and they’d cause more destruction than a dozen sea storms. It was strange to say the least.

Wilbur thought it looked similar to something like desperation. The dragons that came looked haggard or starving, and they fought like cornered wolves even though they were clearly at an advantage. They were evil creatures, but as Wilbur thought back to last night, back to when he stared down a Nadder, he swore there might’ve been some *fear* in its eyes.

But that was ridiculous. No *dragon* would ever feel real fear from a human, those cocky bastards. Wilbur shook the image of the dragon out of his head and turned his attention back to Jack.

“...those Monstrous Nightmares I saw last night, I swear by old Grandma Manifold, could’ve been the same one that took my leg—”

“I thought you said it had been eaten by a Nadder?”

Jack fumbled for an answer before indignantly pointing his tongs at Wilbur. “The trauma muddles my memory!”

“Sure it does.”

“I don’t need *you* second guessing how I lost me own leg!”

Wilbur held his hands up in surrender. “Alright, alright. Whatever you say, Jack.”

“Yeah, yeah. It’ll be whatever I say, that’s for damn sure,” the man grumbled, flipping a pair of goggles over his eyes as he shoved a piece of scrap into the forge.

Wilbur barely suppressed a smile as he handed the smith a mallet, his eyes straying to the wooden stump at the end of Jack’s left leg. He, as well as the rest of the village, knew that Jack had lost the leg after a shark attack, but the bald smith always insisted some type of dragon had taken it in a glorious battle.

Wilbur was mostly told to “get out of me damn way!” while he helped around the forge, so eventually he slipped out the back and escaped.

Phil was busy rebuilding, so Wilbur steered clear of him. As much as he was annoyed by his father’s jests at his lack of bulk, it wasn’t *wrong*. He was a people person, not a physical

person.

The hazy air around the village was difficult to breathe in, with the residual scent of burned hair, smoke, and blood strong enough to make his head spin slightly. So, he decided to take a walk down on the docks.

Only four ships were in the port today. The raid had unluckily happened when a quarter of the village's manpower had been out fishing. Wilbur would tell himself that that was definitely the only reason they were slightly overpowered by the enemy last night.

The decks were coated in a light layer of ice, and Wilbur could take his sweet time carefully treading the slippery wood. The long bridge connecting the docks to the beaches was desperately in need of repair. There were holes in the planks at every other step, even a few boards missing entirely. It was treacherous to travel, practically unthinkably so when it was icy, but Wilbur enjoyed the challenge. In all fairness, the village hadn't had time to think about repairing the less necessary parts of the island. By the time they had made the village itself liveable again, the dragons were back for another serving.

It was an absolutely miserable life, but Vikings were stubborn. They would fix what was broken until there was nothing left to fix. Then they would simply build something new, and the cycle would repeat endlessly.

Wilbur thought it was inspiring.

He slowly made his way across the dangerous bridge, his breath catching when a particularly forceful wave made the entire structure sway. He hopped over gaps and nimbly avoided visibly icy patches, pausing every time his boots would give the slightest slip.

The sun was high above him by the time he touched down onto the stable shore. He cast a backward glance at the bridge, which swayed and creaked mournfully with the tide, then continued on his way.

The beach was rarely affected by dragon raids, so it was a relieving contrast to the destruction on the land above. The ever-shifting sands wrapped around three-quarters of the island, only the docks rested directly next to the stone base of the island preventing a complete ring. Natural pillars of rock jutted out from the shore like chipped teeth, the huge stones making Wilbur feel like he was walking inside the maw of a dragon. Children from the village would dare each other to climb up the rocks to grab a handful of the moss that would sometimes manage to grow at the tips of each pillar.

Tommy had raced Wilbur up them several times. Wilbur had always won, much to the chagrin of his younger brother.

Wilbur sat down beside one of the pillars, looking out at the ocean that lazily rippled under the sky. The seas have been calm lately. Wilbur was surprised there hadn't been any Cauldron or Seashocker sightings yet. Those dragons never strayed from the water, so they had become merely a novelty to view from a distance.

Wilbur traced abstract scribbles into the sand with a piece of driftwood, letting his eyes and his mind wander. The slow tides of the ocean were like music to his ears after the screaming and roaring of last night, that was for sure.

His calming waves were interrupted by a faint screeching.

Wilbur looked up, expecting to find a seabird circling above, but there wasn't another living thing in sight. He dropped his stick and stood, spinning around as he tried to find the source of the noise. There was another soft cry to his left. He turned to see a deep, wide line in the sand that led to the rocky base of the mainland.

Taking out a small dagger, he began to follow the path and the sporadic sounds. Wilbur crested a hill to find that the path ended at the entrance of a cave. He paused for a moment, and sure enough, the mysterious sounds seemed to come from the cave as well.

He crept down to the cave, trying to keep his boots from skidding in the sand beneath him. He stopped at the mouth of the cave, pressing himself against the wall of rock and taking a deep breath to steady himself.

Wilbur held his knife in front of him, cautiously stepping into the cave and looking around. It was filled with the fallen dragons of last night's battle, still and cold with death. There was no light in the cave except from the sun outside, making him uneasy as he walked past the large beasts. Dead as they were, being close to them at all still made his heart jump into his throat.

Something shifted in the shadows deep inside the cave, and Wilbur jumped back in surprise. This cave was full of *dead* dragons, right? These were the dragons that were supposed to be skinned and sold for hefty prices in the coming weeks. There should be nothing alive in here.

But the movement in the shadows only became more frequent and noisy as he came closer, the screeching growing more desperate by the minute.

Wilbur walked up to find a Deadly Nadder thrashing under the ropes of a weighted net, mewling pitifully as it tried and failed to escape. When it laid its eyes on Wilbur, it growled threateningly and attempted to lift its tail to attack. However, the ropes thankfully continued doing their job and kept the tail tightly bound to its owner.

Wilbur would be lying if he said he wasn't shaking. He was vastly underprepared to kill a whole dragon. Unless he aimed for the heart just right with his knife, he would only enrage the beast further.

Despite the clear danger, he came even closer to the dragon, trying to see if there was an pre-existing injury he could make any deeper. The dragon didn't even struggle, it just glared balefully at him as he looked it over. Wilbur made eye contact with the dragon, and it tensed for only a second before going limp.

The dragon had given up.

Wilbur froze, staring at the beast. Dragons were supposed to be horribly violent creatures that wanted to kill or eat anything in sight. They didn't just *give up*.

He looked down to the Nadder's chest and saw a straight shot to its heart. He raised the knife above his head, preparing the strike...and he paused.

The dragon was looking at him again as it patiently waited for its death, and Wilbur was *certain* that this time, this dragon had raw fear in its eyes. It was startling to see any other emotion but unbridled rage in their expression, but fear? That was unsettling.

Wilbur tore his eyes away from the dragon's gaze and stared at where its heart was, willing himself to move his shaking hands and just *do it*, for gods' sakes. As he waited for his damn hands to cooperate, he took in the dragon.

It was a dull, slate grey, but it was clearly supposed to be some sort of blue. The scales were bleached of most of its colour, making the dragon look like some sort of ghost. The sight of its haggard frame, with its bones clearly defined under the skin and a lack of muscle to hide them, was pitiful.

Wilbur couldn't believe it when he began to feel *sorry* for this dragon.

Dragons had murdered his people. They had ripped his own family away from him. They had caused years upon years of suffering to those before him, and it had only gotten worse for those in front of him now. And yet...he felt sorry for one of them.

His hands finally stilled as they held the knife above his head.

The dragon started to stir as he started slicing the ropes with his knife. "Fucking cowardly bastard, can't kill a dragon...what the hell is wrong with me..."

The dragon went still as soon as he was done. He scrambled away and braced himself for a tail spine in the throat.

But nothing came.

He lowered his arms from his head to find the Nadder delicately shaking off the ruined net, flapping its wings and prancing after it realised it was free. Then the dragon and Wilbur made eye contact once again.

The Nadder began stalking towards him with its wings outstretched and its tail threateningly waving around behind it. Wilbur backed into the wall and shut his eyes as he turned away. He was going to die. He was a stupid, cowardly Viking, and he was going to die for it.

After a few moments, he felt the dragon's hot breath on his face. He opened one eye slowly, unsure as to why the dragon was taking so long to finish him. The Deadly Nadder looked him in the eyes, and its pupils dilated.

Wilbur would've called it cute if he wasn't frozen in terror.

The dragon continued sniffing him with interest, then gently rested its snout on his head. It exhaled sharply and backed away, cocking its head at Wilbur before dashing out of the cave to its freedom.

It was only after a minute that Wilbur remembered he had to breathe.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Wilbur spent the next few weeks definitely *not* thinking about his encounter with the dragon. Not at all. He threw himself into helping rebuild the village, much to Phil's surprise and delight. The chief was constantly praising Wilbur's work ethic and motivation, saying that the village wouldn't be where it was without him.

Wilbur was only half-listening to his father, his mind busy elsewhere.

He had shown mercy to a dragon.

If the village knew, Hel, if his own *father* knew about that, he would be shunned. Saving dragons was taboo. Vikings don't save their enemies, especially unprovoked. Wilbur hadn't owed the dragon anything.

He'd just looked into its eyes and saw...more than just an animal. This was a creature with feelings other than uncontrollable, fiery rage. This was a creature in pain.

Maybe it would've been a kinder mercy to have ended its life right there and then, but the thought of hurting the dragon made his stomach churn. It shocked him to think of how just the night prior, he had beheaded a similar beast.

The secret of how he had let one of those dragons free ate at him every day. He was reminded of his actions every time someone praised him for being a fierce warrior or for being a strong leader. He couldn't think of himself as either of those things after that stunt.

Phil was especially unbearable. He had no idea of the motivation behind Wilbur's sudden burst of leadership and assistance, so he assumed it was his son naturally growing into the role of chief.

“...told me you helped carry her pair of milk goats to the new pasture without even being asked! It's like you're a whole new person, Wilbur.”

Wilbur wrung his hands under the table and gave his father a tight grin. *If only you knew.*

“I'm proud of you, son. You'll be a fine chief one day.”

Wilbur stared intently at his dinner, pushing his chicken across the plate with a finger. “You really think so?” he asked, mostly to himself.

Phil reached a hand across the table and gripped Wilbur's shoulder tightly. “I don't think so, I know so. I couldn't have asked for a better heir. A fearless warrior and a cunning leader, all in one! Ah, if only your mother and Techno could see you now.”

Wilbur hummed in reply. His leg was starting to bounce under the table, the only visible sign of his nerves. Thankfully, the Great Hall was far too loud for anyone to hear his knee occasionally bumping into the underside of the wood. Even Phil didn't notice his sudden shyness.

The chief took a swig of water and slammed his cup down. "Gods, Wilbur, I can't wait to show you all the possibilities," he cried, waving his hands about to show the grandeur of his thoughts. "First, of course, we'll have to make sure you have your own heir."

"*Dad*," Wilbur hissed, flushing a bright red. He'd never been more thankful for the dim light of the torches on the walls. "That's not—that's *definitely* not necessary."

"Not yet," Phil conceded with a smile. "But one of these days you're going to have to find a lass that can—"

"I think I hear Tommy calling for me!" Wilbur announced, standing up so abruptly that the table and his chair made loud scraping sounds.

Tommy, who was sitting farther down the table and sharpening a knife, looked up at the mention of his name. "Huh?"

"You're absolutely right Tommy, it's a great day to take a walk."

"It's raining and cold—"

"Never seen better weather!" Wilbur cried, pulling Tommy out of his chair by the shoulder. "Enjoy your lunch, Dad!"

Wilbur dragged Tommy out of the Great Hall so quickly that he didn't hear his father laughing in response.

Tommy was right, as it turned out. The weather was miserable.

Wilbur had led them on an old trail that wound around the woods behind the village, and even the dense trees couldn't block out all of the rain. The path was unrecognisable from disuse on a good day, and in this mud it was utterly indistinguishable. For all Wilbur knew, they had taken a wrong turn and were heading down a deer path.

"*Why* did you decide a stroll was a good idea?"

"Phil was being...Phil."

Tommy raised an eyebrow but didn't press it. He tugged his fur-lined hood farther over his face and huffed, crossing his arms over his chest to conserve some warmth. "You could've just said we were heading home early," he grumbled.

"I didn't think that far ahead," Wilbur admitted, rubbing the back of his neck awkwardly.

“No shit.”

The rain finally began to ease up, and thin rays of sunlight filtered through the leaves above. The forest looked much more approachable when it wasn’t dim and raining. Mossy columns of boulders covered in tree roots and lichen lined the path, some so tall that they towered over the smaller trees around them. Ferns sporting every color of green imaginable covered the forest floor, likely hiding snakes and rodents aplenty.

Or Terrible Terrors, Wilbur reminded himself. He shivered at the thought, his hand straying to the dagger in his pocket. A couple of the pests were manageable, but a group of them set your demise in stone.

Tommy threw off his soaked cape, balling it up and throwing it at the base of a tree. He ran up to one of the boulder stacks and began to climb the rocks. Wilbur stood beneath him to make sure he didn’t lose his footing, and he was rewarded for his efforts with sprays of gravel and dust falling on his face.

The boy reached the top of the pile and stretched out on the damp stone, letting the muted rays of sunshine slowly dry him. He yawned and shut his eyes, clearly in no mood to go any farther.

Wilbur sat at the base of the rocks, lowering his hood and leaning against the boulders with a sigh. “I’m really tired, Tommy.”

“So are the rest of us. You aren’t special, bitch.”

Wilbur snorted. “I meant...all of *this*,” he replied, waving his hands around. “It’s all a mess.”

“A ‘mess’ might be the understatement of the century.”

Wilbur tilted his head up to see Tommy peering down at him with an unimpressed expression. “It might—”

“It’s a *disaster*. How’s your great solution going?”

Wilbur picked at the grass beside him. “Not... *great*, but there’s word of an island a few days away that has very low dragon activity.”

Wilbur had been trying to find a place for the village to relocate to for a few months now, disguising his trips as merely “fulfilling his need to see the world before he settles down as chief”. Phil bought the excuse, and so did most of the village. Most of the village, unfortunately, did not include Tommy.

He’d found Wilbur studying maps and old journals late one night and immediately questioned the man’s new “hobby”. He refused to listen to Wilbur’s half-hearted excuses and demanded a real reason as to why he was toiling over yellowed paper.

No Viking was as stubborn as Tommy, so Wilbur was pleasantly surprised to find the young man sitting next to him and asking earnest questions. Most Vikings would have yelled at

Wilbur and said that they were *fine* where they were, and that a Viking *never* surrenders. Tommy was, once again, not like most Vikings.

Tommy also prided himself in his ability to make excuses, and he loved telling intricate stories to Phil about Wilbur's "interest".

"...so you'll be gone another week."

Wilbur was pulled out of his thoughts by how unhappy Tommy sounded. "Well, that's only if I'm not chased off of the island by some crazy Vikings, or an even crazier dragon."

"I guess."

Wilbur stood up to give Tommy a reassuring look. "I'll try to make it quick; don't worry."

Tommy stared at him for a moment before slowly nodding. "You'd better. I don't have anyone to annoy if you're off exploring the great wide world."

Wilbur snorted, shaking his head as he walked over to grab Tommy's damp cloak. "I'm glad I'm so entertaining for you."

"You're useless otherwise!" Tommy called.

Wilbur whipped around to make a witty comeback, but he froze in his tracks. "Tommy, stay very, very still."

The boy blinked. "What are you..." he started, not listening to what Wilbur had *just* fucking told him to do and turning around to see what the man was staring at. "Oh."

An absolutely *massive* Timberjack had crept up on them while they were bantering. It had lowered its head to look at Tommy, placing its toothy maw right behind the young Viking's head. The dragon started when it realized that the two had noticed its existence, glancing between the two Vikings with a confused expression.

Wilbur cursed himself inwardly as he slowly drew his dagger. The damn lizard's brown scales blended in so well with the forest and the dappled sunlight. He wouldn't have noticed it unless he was looking directly into its eyes.

The Timberjack placed both of its wings around the boulder as it came closer to Tommy, sniffing the boy cautiously.

Tommy turned his head to shoot Wilbur a look of pure terror. "Wilbur..."

Before Wilbur could charge the creature, it opened its mouth...and *licked* Tommy.

Wilbur's jaw dropped as the Timberjack started licking Tommy's face incessantly, its pupils blown wide. He nearly let go of his knife in shock.

Tommy was trying to push the dragon's face away gingerly, letting out a string of curses when the dragon did not stop. "Stupid fucking reptile...get off of my face... *stop* it—"

The Timberjack made a cooing sound and picked Tommy up by the back of his shirt. The Viking cried out in indignation as the dragon started carrying him away from Wilbur and the boulder pile.

Wilbur tightened his grip on the knife and chased after them. “Put him *down!*” he screamed, waving his arms around and trying to distract the creature from *stealing* his *little brother*.

The dragon ignored both of their protests and continued crashing through the undergrowth, its sharp wings cutting through trees and ferns alike. Wilbur dodged the trees as they fell, trying his best to avoid the branches that snagged at his clothes. The dragon’s tail waved dangerously close to his face, making Wilbur stumble back in alarm every time it came too near.

Tommy cursed out the dragon as he swung from its mouth, promising the wrath of Chief Philza and the gods above. Wilbur would have found it hilarious if he wasn’t terrified for Tommy’s life.

The Timberjack eventually stopped in a large clearing in the woods. The ground was scorched beyond recognition, charred logs and stumps crumbling into ash as the dragon brushed past. The beast set Tommy down and patted his head with its chin before circling the young Viking slowly.

Wilbur took this opportunity to dash in front of Tommy and point his tiny knife at the dragon, glaring at the scaly thief. The Timberjack paused its circling to growl at Wilbur, who was probably interrupting its meal.

The dragon pounced, and Wilbur grabbed Tommy close and shut his eyes tight.

Wilbur...was surprisingly not inside of a dragon’s stomach when he opened his eyes. He and Tommy were cocooned in scales and leathery wings.

“Wilbur?”

“Yeah?”

“Is this Valhalla?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“Thank the gods...Valhalla isn’t this lame.”

Wilbur snorted, then fumbled around the wings and tried to find an opening they could safely escape out of. He turned around and was met with the gaze of the Timberjack. It cocked its head and let out a huff that could’ve been a laugh. Wilbur and the dragon looked down at the dagger in his hand at the same time. Before Wilbur could move, the dragon darted forward and plucked the blade from Wilbur’s grasp and threw it away.

Once again, Wilbur was rendered speechless.

Tommy scooted forward to glare at the dragon. “I’d like to go home.”

The Timberjack searched Tommy's face for a moment before yapping in reply. It shifted a bit and settled its head on the ground, closing its eyes to rest. Tommy tried pushing against the leathery prison they were encased in, but the dragon lazily grabbed Tommy's shirt with a taloned foot and pulled him close to its chest.

Tommy crossed his arms over his chest and huffed. "This is *so* unfair."

Wilbur and Tommy escaped a few agonizing hours later, when the dragon was deep in sleep and rolled over. They narrowly missed being sliced in half by the wings as they quietly crept away, but the dragon didn't seem to notice their leaving.

They appeared back at the village with ash all over their clothes and faces, and in Tommy's case, covered in dragon saliva.

Phil was understandably worried for them after he took in their appearances. "What happened to you two? You look like you were in a fight with a dragon!"

Wilbur and Tommy exchanged a look before unanimously responding, "We fell."

Phil opened his mouth to question them further, but the two were already trudging up the stairs to their rooms. Wilbur was exhausted after such a terrifying close encounter, and Tommy desperately wanted to stop smelling like a dragon.

The next morning, Wilbur tiredly packed his things to travel to that promising island. Tommy sat on his bed while he rifled through his room, lost in thought.

"We were hugged by a *dragon* yesterday."

"...yes."

"We weren't *eaten* by a dragon yesterday."

"Mhm."

"Are we the only Vikings to survive such a close encounter?"

Wilbur paused in his packing a set of knives. "Possibly," he conceded, giving Tommy a look. "But that does *not* mean that every dragon is like that."

"It's not like I'm going to go looking for dragons after this!"

Wilbur raised an eyebrow.

"I'm not! I *know* dragons are dangerous, but doesn't this just make you *think*? Like, what if there are more...nice dragons out there?"

Wilbur clenched his jaw and turned away, the image of the pitiful Nadder invading his mind. *What if there are?*

He simply hummed in reply, buckling his knapsack shut and swinging it over his shoulder.

Phil was waiting for them when they came downstairs, pacing the floor and muttering to himself while absentmindedly twirling an axe in his hands. The chief looked more anxious than *Wilbur* was about this ordeal.

Wilbur cleared his throat when he stepped off of the bottom stair, barely flinching when his father instinctually pointed the axe at his face. "Hey, Dad."

"Sorry, Will. I'm just a bit nervous about all of this."

Tommy and Wilbur glanced at each other at those words. Chief Philza, the notorious Angel of Death that had killed hundreds of dragons, was *nervous*. It was almost unheard of for any Viking to show weakness like that, let alone a chief.

"Oh?"

"Well, with all of these raids...is it really the best idea to take away one of our strongest fighters now?"

Wilbur furrowed his brow, trying to figure out who his father was talking about. The crew of his ship wasn't particularly notable—

"*He means you,*" Tommy hissed, jabbing an elbow into Wilbur's side.

Wilbur started at that. "Oh, um. I *do* think this is a good idea. The attack was only a week ago, the dragons won't come so soon after a raid. Especially not when they left with so many supplies."

Phil nodded to himself, thinking it over for a moment. He clapped his hands together with a wide smile, as if he hadn't just been having doubts. "Well, may the gods be with you, son. Good luck on your journey."

Wilbur was then subject to a rib-cracking hug.

"Stay safe," Phil whispered. He let Wilbur go, and the young man gasped for air.

Wilbur rubbed his sore rib cage and gave his father a shaky smile. "Thanks, Dad."

Phil nodded and resumed his pacing. Tommy and Wilbur stepped around the chief and exited their home with a unanimous sigh. Phil meant well, he did, but sometimes his caution around his sons became overbearing.

It was understandable, after all, the chief had lost his wife and other son to a raid years ago. The man had never been the same since. He was still a fearsome Viking, but he was much more...*delicate* when it came to his family. Wilbur had only been allowed out of his house

during dragon attacks after years of training. His father had to be *certain* that he wouldn't lose another loved one.

Most Vikings handed their children a weapon when they learned how to walk, and they told the child to have fun and bring back a few dragon tails.

Wilbur stopped at the edge of the docks with Tommy, and the two gazed at the battered ship that was getting ready to set sail. Most of their ships were a patchwork of discoloured wood adorned with spiked shields. There were a fair amount of scorch marks across the body and masts from battles long past. They were like the Vikings, in a way. Battered, burned, and stubborn as yaks.

"You're heading out," Tommy commented, not meeting Wilbur's eyes.

Wilbur turned Tommy around to face him, squeezing the boy's shoulders. "I'll be back in no time."

Tommy tackled the older man in a hug, squeezing Wilbur nearly as tightly as their father had. "Don't be stupid and get eaten."

Wilbur chuckled. "I'll try my best. Maybe I'll meet a friendly dragon."

Tommy wriggled his way out of the hug and gave Wilbur a mock salute, waving before running off to the viewing cliff. He'd be able to see Wilbur's ship for a long while from there.

Wilbur smiled at the sight of Tommy dashing away, then turned back to the docks with a deep breath.

Here's hoping, he thought, making his way down to the boat. *Here's hoping I can save my people.*

No pressure.

The trip to the island went much faster than the crew thought it would. The weather was bright and clear after a few days of miserable clouds, and only once did a Viking think they'd spotted a Scauldron in the distance.

One their destination had come into view, Wilbur was put on edge. The island looked perfect, but it was silent. No bustle of a village, no gulls overhead, and no telltale screeches of dragons. It was like looking at a picture. There was no *life*.

The crew eased the ship to a stop on a beach, setting down the anchor and uneasily surveying the land up close. The sound of the anchor dropping was the only noise they could hear.

Wilbur took an axe and a shield from the ship before jumping onto the sand, landing on his knees in the sand.

“Set up camp,” he ordered, nodding to the crew of the ship. They nodded back to him and began unloading the makeshift tents and barrels of food they had prepared for the journey.

The tension in the air was palpable, and it *bothered* Wilbur. Nowhere should be *this* quiet, especially not with such a promising landscape. The trees should be full of birds, and there should be at the very least crabs on the beach. But...there’s genuinely nothing here.

“Island looks deserted,” he called, hefting his axe over his shoulder. “I’m going in deeper to see if there’s *anything* at all.”

“Is that safe?”

“I’ll be fine.”

There was a reluctant chorus of “aye” from the crew, but Wilbur brushed off their concern. He can take whatever is out there, it doesn’t seem like much anyways.

He crept through the foliage cautiously, becoming more unnerved with every step. Even as he went deeper into the heart of this place, there was no sound. The silence was stifling, enveloping him in quietness as he went further. If he strained his ears, he could hear the muffled sound of his crew setting up the temporary camp, but even that was quieter than it should’ve been.

The forest felt like it was holding its breath. *Waiting*.

It was stunning here, though. The woods were obviously flourishing with a lack of anything eating away at it. The ferns underfoot were lush and soft, much more appealing than the stiff, brittle plants of his own island. There were even some flowers mixed in with the bushes, little bursts of bright colour that stood out starkly against the green background.

A flash of light caught his eye, and he stopped, expecting to see a particularly bright flower. He glanced over to the source of colour and found a splash of offensively orange substance on a tree. Thinking it was some exotic moss, he came closer. But instead, it appeared to be a sort of sap-like solid. It was hard and smooth to the touch, and it seemed brittle and light.

Tommy would like this, he mused, drawing his axe back and hitting the amber-coloured sap. The sharp blade *bounced off* of the sap like it was a solid rock, and Wilbur went stumbling backwards.

“What in Valhalla...” Wilbur muttered, peering at the new dent in his metal blade.

Wilbur shook his head and stepped away from the amber, giving it a wide berth as he continued on. He didn’t have time to experiment with indestructible tree sap, no matter how intrigued he was by the substance.

The loud *clang* his axe had made on impact had been muffled by the trees, not even providing an echo. But Wilbur paused when he heard a faint *whoosh* overhead, and he immediately took cover.

Low dragon activity, as it turned out, did not mean *no* dragon activity

Wilbur strained his ears from the tree he was hiding behind, slowly peeking his head around the trunk to look for a dragon's shadow. He sensed nothing, so he went back to walking.

He was tenser than he'd been before, the danger of a dragon nearby heightening all of his senses. Wilbur was about to turn back and see if his crew had seen anything when he heard something...singing.

It wasn't a person, that was for sure, but it didn't sound like any bird he knew of. The mournful calling was raw and beautiful, and he found himself walking toward the sound.

The song led him to a clearing in the trees. The wailing reverberated in his ears long after the noise had stopped, filling his head with the haunting music until he was spinning around and trying to find it again. He felt a sense of deep loss when he heard no more of the warbling.

Wilbur backed out of the exposed space, retreating to the safety of the trees. He backed up until he hit something solid, which confused him. He had just come from this way, there were no trees here.

He turned to find bright yellow scales behind him, and he looked up to see a dragon staring intently at him.

Before he could scream, the dragon snatched him up roughly and took off from the ground. Wilbur raised his axe and tried swiping at the beast, but it shook him until he dropped the weapon into the forest below. He held onto his shield tightly and tried not to look at the treetops beneath him, feeling sick with all the motion.

But flashes of orange caught his eye once again, and he peeked over his shield to see the source. His stomach turned over as he learned why the island was silent.

There were mounds of the amber sap everywhere beneath him, and inside were the remains of dragons, birds, deer, and other things he couldn't make out from all the way up here. It was terrifyingly beautiful, the way all of this life was perfectly frozen in orange glass.

There were some mounds with holes in them, where living things clearly *had bren*, but weren't anymore. Wilbur didn't want to think about where they must have gone.

The dragon dove back into the forest abruptly and threw Wilbur to the ground. He bit back a cry of pain at the rough landing and staggered to his feet, shakily holding his shield in front of him. The brightly colored dragon crooned as it crept closer to him, and Wilbur's head felt light and fuzzy as the sound penetrated his skull.

"Get...back," he gasped, shaking his head furiously. "Get *back*!"

In response, the dragon spat at him.

It was the same sap substance he had seen before. And now it was covering his shield, steaming as it dripped off of the wood. As it hardened, the shield became much heavier, and

Wilbur had to drop his only defence.

The dragon was almost on top of him at this point, and looked like it was about to shoot the amber at him once again. Its crooning was getting louder and higher-pitched, making Wilbur's vision blur and spin.

"Wait wait wait—" Wilbur screeched, holding his hands out towards the reptile. The dragon paused, its mouth agape and prepared to spit. "I can sing, too! See?"

In one of the most ridiculous decisions Wilbur had ever made in his twenty-five years of life, he began to sing to a dragon. It was pitchy and frantic, and it sounded more like wailing with how panicked he was.

But it *worked*.

The dragon drew back suddenly, cocking its head as it tried to figure out what Wilbur was doing. It sniffed at Wilbur before making a tentative chirping noise. Wilbur mimicked the sound, praying he hadn't just said something offensive to the dragon.

Wilbur froze as the dragon leapt into the air and did a few flips before landing in front of Wilbur again. It started warbling and crooning back to him quickly, apparently very excited that its prey could sing. Wilbur gave a nervous laugh and continued copying it, which only agitated the dragon further. The blue frills on either side of its face flapped madly as it sang to the Viking, and the spines on its back clicked and rustled as they shivered with excitement.

The dragon danced around Wilbur, flapping its butterfly-like wings quickly. The song was growing louder and louder by the second until the man and the dragon were practically shrieking at each other. Wilbur stopped for a moment to catch his breath, and the dragon finished its song with a satisfied trill.

The two stared at each other in silence for a moment.

"Hello," Wilbur breathed, cautiously watching the dragon for any sudden moves.

The dragon yipped in reply, bobbing its head up and down. Wilbur nodded in return, laughing in sheer wonder of his situation. He was *talking to a dragon*. Well, maybe not exactly talking, as he had no idea what he or the dragon were saying, but it was communication nonetheless.

The dragon sat back on its hind legs, towering over Wilbur. It studied him for a moment before grabbing him with its short forelegs and flying towards a huge amber ball.

Wilbur was being taken to its nest.

He was gently placed in a bed of straw inside the spherical nest, and the dragon threw some extra straw on him. Wilbur was struck with the thought that he was being *tucked in* by a wild dragon. The creature circled him three times before laying down next to the man and curling its tail around him. It softly warbled as it swept more bedding onto the Viking, huffing when Wilbur sneezed. The dragon shut its eyes and relaxed, ready to sleep next to its new toy.

Wilbur, however, was not ready to sleep. He was *not* going to be held hostage by a dragon again, his pride couldn't take it.

“No, *no*, we are not doing this,” he whispered, gingerly lifting the dragon’s tail off of him. “Not today, nope.”

He made it to the edge of the ball-shaped nest before he heard a confused trill. Wilbur froze and turned to the dragon, who was giving him a mournful look. He glanced at the dragon, then at the ground, then back at the dragon.

“Sorry!” he called, jumping out of the nest and making a run for it.

The dragon screeched with something that sounded like pain, and it took all of Wilbur’s willpower to keep going. He had given a dragon mercy once, he was not going to be a plaything for another.

Wilbur crashed through the forest as he ran, stumbling over bushes and barely avoiding trees. He didn’t care how many bruises and scratches he would come out of here with, he was *alive*.

The crew had barely set up anything in the time he was gone. They stared at his ragged figure and started to question what was happening, but Wilbur interrupted them.

“We need to leave. *Now*,” he yelled, pushing the Vikings to the ship.

“But the camp—”

“To Hel with the camp!” Wilbur cried, frantically glancing back at the eerie island. “It doesn’t matter! *We need to go*.”

The Vikings didn’t question him any further, and they took whatever fit in their arms as they boarded the ship.

An ear-splitting shriek shattered the silence into sharp pieces, and all the Vikings turned to see a brightly-colored dragon flying their way. The men furiously prepped the ship to leave, and several went below deck to use the emergency paddles.

By the time the dragon had landed on the shore, Wilbur’s ship had taken off. The beast paced along the shoreline, crying out as it watched the boat leave the island. After a few minutes, the dragon sullenly retreated to the forest, and the silence returned.

Wilbur held up a hand, and the Vikings were able to relax. The paddles were retracted, and the crew was able to let the ship sail normally while lamenting the loss of resources on the island.

Wilbur didn’t move from the back of the ship until the island was out of sight.

Chapter End Notes

ohohohoho?

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Just a quick warning for vomiting in this one, stay safe all!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Wilbur had never been happier to see his island home. The old hunk of rock looked as appealing as lush fields after the too-perfect place he had escaped from.

The docks were bustling with excitement and curiosity, ready to hear what the chief's heir had come across to cause him to come home so soon. Wilbur's ship was quickly unloaded, with no one batting an eye at the significant lack of resources they came back with. It wasn't uncommon to lose entire ships out in the great unknown, let alone some tents and barrels.

The Vikings eagerly crowded around Wilbur, waiting with bated breath to hear about his adventure. No matter how many battles they had fought in or near-death experiences they had had, a Viking's tale was always regarded with respect and awe.

Wilbur, however, was in no mood to share his "glory".

"Island's uninhabitable," he stated shortly, craning his neck over the crowd to try and find his family. "Where's the chief?"

The Vikings pointed him in the direction of the Great Hall, gently pushing him toward the huge doors. They wanted to know all of the gory details, insignificant events, and fascinating discoveries. Whispers of tall tales followed him up the path as the crowd trailed his ascent to the building, making Wilbur shift uncomfortably.

He couldn't *lie* to them; that was dishonourable. But at the same time, he had no idea how they'd react to a...*clingy* dragon, for lack of a better word. Vikings wanted chaos and destruction; they had no need for bonds with their enemies. Their lives were painfully simple, and oh, how Wilbur envied it.

Wilbur threw open the doors to the Great Hall, letting in a rush of cold air. The Hall, which had once been a rugged cave that the Vikings had stubbornly and meticulously carved into something inhabitable, quieted as the people laid eyes on his exhausted form.

Phil looked like he was in the middle of an arm wrestling contest with another man. He took advantage of his opponent's alarm and easily threw the man's hand to the table with a triumphant cry. "Wilbur!" he called, standing up from the table and rushing over to greet his son. "That was fast...what did you find?"

Wilbur said nothing. He searched his father's face as he struggled to come up with an answer. He could trust his father, right?

"Any new trading villages?" Phil pressed, oblivious to Wilbur's conflict. "Better yet, any new settlers to conquer? Might be good to expand our reach."

Some of the other Vikings cheered in agreement, cracking their knuckles and shoving each other good-naturedly.

Wilbur swallowed. "Ah...no. Just an empty island, I'm afraid. It was beautiful, but it looked like there was some sort of disease at the centre of it. I wouldn't want to risk our village."

Phil's face fell for a moment before his wide grin returned with even more gusto. "Atta boy! Look at him, taking care of us! That's your future chief, right here."

The crowd erupted into a chorus of yelling and laughter, many people coming up to clap Wilbur on the back or give him a one-armed hug. After they realised there was no real glory to discuss, the Vikings went back to their lives and left Wilbur alone. Even Phil, after a final few good words, went back to his games.

Wilbur sighed in relief when the suffocating presence of the village finally gave him some peace. He looked around for Tommy, and he found the boy leaning up against a pillar with a smirk on his face.

Wilbur walked up to the young man. “What’s that look for?”

Tommy shrugged, the knowing smile on his face still stuck in place. “Oh, nothing. I just want the inside scoop on what *really* happened on that island.”

“I told the village—”

“A load of bullshit, yeah, I know. Here,” Tommy replied, taking the man’s hand. “We’ll go and speak privately. I can tell you’re *dying* to tell someone about it all.”

Wilbur let the boy drag him away, waving sheepishly to the people sitting in the Hall . “Well, that’s nice, but I should really go and unpack my—”

“It’ll only be a little while, come *on*,” Tommy whined, tugging on Wilbur’s arm harder.

Wilbur snorted, pulling his hand out of the youth’s grasp. “Fine. But I can walk on my own.”

Tommy paused for a moment, giving him a speculative look. Then he took off sprinting in the direction of the woods. “I’ll beat you there!”

“That—That’s not *fair*! I just got back on shore, you know I don’t have my land legs—”

“Sucks to be you!”

Wilbur eventually caught up to Tommy, who was waiting for him at their pile of boulders. Wilbur's hand automatically flew to his knife, spinning around as he looked for any threats. A dragon had crept up on them once before, but he would never let that happen again.

Tommy laughed at his caution, climbing the rocks to sit high above Wilbur's head. "Relax, will you? I thought we knew that every dragon here adored me!"

"We were lucky *once*," Wilbur growled, his eyes darting around the clearing. "We won't be so fortunate next time."

"Oh, I don't know about that," Tommy replied, his voice getting more distant. "Catch!"

"Wh—" Wilbur was cut off as something heavy and cold landed in his arms, making him stumble to the side. He looked down at what Tommy had thrown to him. A Terrible Terror yawned in his arms, its thorn-like claws grasping for purchase on his cloak.

Wilbur screamed.

The Terrible Terror screamed right back, and Wilbur could see a faint orange glow building in the back of its throat. He dropped the thing like it had burned him, wiping his hands on his shirt and shakily pointing a knife at the little devil. The dragon hissed at him, raising its wings threateningly as its pupils narrowed.

"Oi!" Tommy called from above. "Play nice, you two. Wilbur, Henry is *delicate*, you can't just fucking throw him like that!"

"*You named it?*" Wilbur hissed, never breaking his staredown with the creature.

"Yeah, I did! Now put the knife down, he doesn't like knives very much."

Wilbur laughed hysterically. “Oh, yeah, just throw away my only defence!”

He ran a hand through his hair, blinking incredulously as he took in the situation. In the few days he’d been gone, Tommy had somehow befriended a Terror. Right under his father’s nose, at that! Phil would be *so* pissed if he knew how close they were to a dragon.

“Does Phil know you’re doing this?”

“Do I *look* stupid?” Tommy called back, peeking over the edge of the stone tower with *another fucking dragon in his arms*. “No, Dad doesn’t know about this. I took a hike one day, was kidnapped by these little shits, and wasn’t eaten alive! We’re best buds now.”

“Best...buds,” Wilbur whispered in disbelief, turning his gaze back to the Terror in front of him. The tiny dragon was creeping closer to him, its pupils no longer as thin as before. It looked... *curious*.

Wilbur—against his better judgement and probably the judgement of his ancestors looking down on him—knelt and set his weapon down. The dragon and the man stared at each other for a few painfully silent moments, and then the Terrible Terror pounced.

Wilbur cried out in shock as the dragon barreled into his chest, knocking him to the ground. It clung to his shirt and refused to let go, no matter how much Wilbur tried to pry the creature off of him. He eventually gave up with a sigh, throwing his arms to the ground and resigning himself to his fate. The dragon gave a satisfied squawk and curled up on his chest, snuggling into the fabric of his shirt with a content whine.

“That’s a good lad, Henry!” Tommy praised. Wilbur raised his head to see the boy petting and cooing over three other Terrible Terrors.

He set his head on the ground without a word, too surprised to say anything meaningful.

Henry lifted his head and sniffed at Wilbur, then crawled over to pick at the man's hair. His tiny talons dug into his forehead and neck, and they threatened to break the skin if Wilbur tried to resist.

"Ah, no...off, *off* of my head, please," Wilbur muttered, attempting to push the dragon to the ground. The dragon growled and climbed up further, burying its snout in the man's hair. "What could possibly be so interesting?"

Henry drew back after a moment, and he dropped something hard on Wilbur's nose before going back to snoozing on the Viking's shirt. Wilbur winced as he gingerly picked up whatever the dragon had found, and was surprised to see a chunk of amber between his fingers.

"Whatcha got there?" Tommy asked, climbing down his boulders with several dragons on his shoulders. "Did Henry get you a gift?"

"Not exactly," Wilbur grumbled. Tommy ran over and gently picked Henry up and off of the man, somehow doing it with ease after Wilbur had struggled. "It's from the island."

"Pretty," Tommy observed, taking it from Wilbur as the man sat up and dusted himself off. "Not like any tree sap I've ever seen, though."

"That's because it *isn't* sap. It's from a dragon."

Tommy stared at him. "Like what...a scale? Doesn't look like a scale."

"No, no, the dragon on the island shot this stuff from its mouth. Like how some dragons breathe fire, Cauldrons can shoot water they hold, and this one...this one spat amber."

"Weird," Tommy replied, holding the stone up to the sun. "There was just one dragon on the island? Where were the others? And why was its *spit* in your hair?"

“One dragon, yes. I think it ate all the others, honestly,” Wilbur responded, running a hand along Henry’s snout. The dragon made a content snorting sound before settling next to him. “And well...the dragon took me.”

“Took you?”

“Yeah. Snatched me up and into the sky. It wanted to eat me, but then I sang to it, and it decided I was better off in their nest.”

Tommy stared at him once again. “You sang to a dragon.”

“I panicked!”

Tommy’s face broke into a huge grin. “You *sang* to a dragon! What, did you want to sing it a lullaby so it would fall asleep?”

“You little *shit*—no, I wanted to distract it.”

“Sure, sure,” Tommy assured him. He turned to one of his Terrors. “I don’t believe him for a second.”

“Hey!”

Wilbur fell back into life at the village with few hitches. He had enjoyed the break from the constant pressure of being the next chief, but it was good to be home. As much as he hated his father’s neverending nagging, he still missed him.

However, trips into the woods with Tommy were definitely necessary.

They would walk to their old boulder spot, and Tommy would climb the stacks of rocks and play with dragons. Wilbur would sit off to the side, reading, sharpening his knives, or making sketches of the Terrors and Timberjacks that visited.

The Book of Dragons was the best source of dragon knowledge they had, aside from their own experiences, but its illustrations were very outdated. The ornate pencil sketches hidden in the pages did absolutely nothing to prepare young Vikings for what the dragons were really like.

Now, Wilbur was actually close enough to really observe them. It turned out that Terrible Terrors have barbs on their tail. Little hooks that they used to help them find purchase in rocks or trees as they climbed. Wilbur watched one dig its tail into a tree branch and just hang there for a while as it watched its brethren and Tommy play.

It was utterly fascinating to Wilbur. He knew he wasn't the strongest Viking, not by a long shot, but he was the only Viking that he knew of that really craved knowledge. He'd read through the Book of Dragons cover to cover countless times, absorbing each and every word off of the pages. He studied maps relentlessly, and he probably knew the archipelago better than most captains.

The scholarly side of Wilbur was overjoyed to watch the dragons frolic in their natural habitat, no stealing sheep or burning buildings at all. Just a few dragons having fun in the wild.

Once in a while, one of the dragons would get tired of playing and settle by Wilbur to take a break. In the beginning, it had terrified him. He'd frozen when one came near him or looked his way, until Tommy coached him on how to treat them.

“They scared me, too,” he confessed once. “But they’re just sweethearts, deep down. Here, hold out your hand like this and let the dragon come to you. They don’t like sudden movements, so you have to be calm.”

Wilbur had done as he was told, and sure enough, the few tired Terrors who rested by him had rubbed his hand with their snouts and contentedly slept in his lap. They would allow him to pet them just behind their horns, but he learned that they preferred attention under their chins.

Suffice to say, he now had very detailed drawings of Terrible Terrors on their backs or asleep.

Unfortunately, it wasn't all playful dragons and slightly annoying fathers.

Once the curiosity around his trip had died down, the village became somewhat bearable to walk through. He was still being stopped every few minutes, though, by a Viking that wasn't satisfied with his insistence that nothing happened.

Jack, at the very least, seemed just as annoyed by the questions as Wilbur was.

"D'you need something fixed, or are ya just being a bunch of nosy pricks?" he yelled at a group of Vikings that were loitering in front of his shop. They cleared out quickly once they realised that the man had spotted them. "And good riddance to the lot of ya!"

"I swear sometimes, these Vikings are such gossip seekers. They should be *glory* seekers, for gods' sake," Jack ranted, angrily pounding a slab of metal. "It's like dear old Granny Manifold used to say—"

"Don't go looking for what you can't find yourself," Wilbur finished, holding back an amused smile as he handed Jack a pair of tongs.

The smith nodded importantly, shoving the metal into the forge. "Exactly. She would've liked you. You're both very no-nonsense people. Wake up, kill the dragon, go to sleep, dream about killin' another, then wake up again."

Wilbur stared at the ground like it was the most interesting thing in the world, giving the other man a quiet hum of acknowledgement.

Before Jack could continue about his *fantastic* grandmother, Tommy swung into the shop. “Need Will,” he announced, abruptly tugging the Viking away from the forge.

“Oi! I wasn’t finished with him!”

“Don’t care, Jack!”

Tommy pulled Wilbur in the direction of the forest insistently. “Henry and his brothers are acting weird. They keep hiding from me.”

“Maybe they decided to act like dragons for once,” Wilbur replied, trying in vain to free his wrist from Tommy’s clutches. “Avoid humans at all costs.”

Tommy gave him an offended look. “They’re my *friends*, Will. They wouldn’t do that. There’s something in the forest that’s scaring them, and I want to help. I’m worried.”

The boy gave Wilbur a pleading, desperate expression. Wilbur sighed and reluctantly nodded. “Fine. I’ll come check it out.”

Tommy took them both into the woods, but he didn’t lead them to their usual rocky destination. He went in the exact opposite direction, instead heading towards the cliffs overlooking the ocean. It was certainly...quieter than normal. There were barely any crickets or birds making the usual background noise, reminding Wilbur uncomfortably of the island.

Tommy stopped in front of a huge tree, pointing at one of the hollows in the roots. When Wilbur crouched down, he could make out the shivering forms of a few Terrors. They were clearly terrified of leaving their nest, and they gave the two Vikings pitiful looks.

Wilbur stood up and looked around, trying to find any obvious signs of the disruption. There were no uprooted trees, overturned rocks, or flattened grass that pointed to a bigger dragon. The forest was just calm and quiet, betraying no hints of danger anywhere he looked.

“What do we do?” Tommy asked, his voice thick with emotion. Wilbur turned to find him near tears as he looked at the scared dragons. “I’m scared for them, Wilbur.”

Wilbur set a firm hand on the boy’s shoulder and squeezed reassuringly. “Here’s what we’ll do. I’ll go and scout around, and you stay here to protect the dragons.”

Tommy sniffed and nodded, determination washing over his distressed expression. “Okay. Good luck out there.”

“Same to you.”

Wilbur took a small axe from his belt into his hands, and he started walking off into the eerily quiet woods. He didn’t like this atmosphere, not one bit. It felt too similar to the other island. The last thing he wanted was that strange dragon terrorizing his home.

The thought of Tommy trapped in amber made him stop in his tracks.

He *couldn’t* let that happen. That dragon, he was certain, was a dangerous one. No matter how strangely it had acted towards him in the beginning, he had to remember that it was a threat.

Usually, he’d have caught a glimpse of a Timberjack, or another Terrible Terror at least. Today, there were no dragons to be seen. He felt the forest watch him as he disturbed the still atmosphere, waiting to see what happened next.

The song started quietly, so faint that he barely noticed it, but then it grew to a soft, soothing level. Once again, Wilbur was disoriented. He felt light and dizzy, and he couldn’t make out most of his thoughts. And once again, Wilbur found himself moving towards the sound.

If he had been thinking clearly, he would've heard his mind screaming at him to *run*. He was not thinking clearly, and the only thought that popped into his head was how pretty the song was.

After a few minutes of slowly walking towards the singing, Wilbur came across a clearing. The singing dragon was in that clearing, watching Wilbur intently. It stopped singing as it bounced over to him, and Wilbur's head recovered much quicker than it had the first time. The ringing in his ears only lasted for half a minute, and then he was back to normal, if not still a bit dizzy.

Wilbur frantically tried backing away, and the dragon stopped. It had an unreadable look in its eye as it surveyed the man. Wilbur froze, certain that this time the dragon wanted to devour him.

Tommy's voice from before floated back to him. *Let the dragon come to you*, he'd said. Wilbur shakily outstretched a hand and waited for the dragon to approach him. The dragon slowly tilted its head, the blue fins on either side of its skull twitching. It crept closer, staring at Wilbur's palm until its snout was practically touching it.

Wilbur looked away, too cowardly to watch the dragon eat his hand.

The dragon gently nudged Wilbur's hand with a low warble, then brushed past it to put its short forelegs on the Viking's shoulders. Wilbur looked up to see the dragon towering over him, its eyes flicking across his face. When it saw how terrified he looked, it let out a mournful croon and squeezed Wilbur's shoulders.

After Wilbur carefully controlled his expression, it squeezed him again and lifted a foreleg to gently pat him on the head. Then it sat back on its haunches and patiently waited for Wilbur to do something.

Wilbur ran away.

He dashed through the trees, jumping over tall ferns and rocks alike as he tried to escape the dragon. This time, though, the dragon wasn't so keen on letting him get away. It stayed right on his tail, chirping in protest when Wilbur refused to slow down.

Tommy was dutifully waiting at the tree, and he shrieked when he saw Wilbur and a massive dragon barreling past. He hid behind the trunk when Wilbur ran by, standing in front of the Terrors' nest.

The dragon finally caught up to Wilbur and picked him up in its mouth, effectively ending the short chase. It sat back on its hind legs once again and dropped Wilbur into its lap, securing him by placing its claws on his shoulders. The dragon started singing quietly to him as it rubbed his back, trying to calm him down. Wilbur was having none of it, and he struggled against the restraints.

He gave up when the dragon's tail snaked around him and flattened his arms to his body. He sighed and glared up at the dragon holding him captive, who either ignored his expression or didn't know what it meant.

Tommy and four Terrors poked their heads out from behind the tree to see Wilbur's shame.

"Did you—did you get a fucking dragon on that island?" Tommy asked, bewildered at the treatment Wilbur was receiving.

"I guess so," Wilbur muttered, shifting a bit. The tail tightened around his chest, and he reluctantly relaxed. There was no getting out of this.

Tommy, meanwhile, was doubled over in laughter. Apparently, Wilbur's new friend was *so* funny. The pack of Terrors had crept out from their nest to look at the new dragon, who was paying them no mind whatsoever. They decided it wasn't a threat and went back to being... well, Terrors, as they tussled on the forest floor.

Tommy sat in front of Wilbur, still chuckling. "What are you gonna name her? I don't think she'll be leaving you anytime soon."

“She?”

“*Yup*,” Tommy replied, drawing out the word like he was explaining something very obvious. “Females are always the deadliest, most territorial, and colourful. They’re cool like that.”

Wilbur glanced up at the dragon. “What’s your name?”

The dragon paused, then began convulsing. The Vikings watched in confusion as she oddly stretched and tightened her throat, and then her mouth opened. Half of a salmon’s horrifying corpse, covered in orange-tinged saliva, fell into Wilbur’s lap with an equally disgusting noise.

Tommy was once again inconsolable with hysteria, while Wilbur grimaced. “I *hate* dragons.”

“She’s—she’s trying to *feed* you,” Tommy choked out, genuine tears in his eyes. “Like some sort of mama bird.”

“I don’t want this food,” Wilbur snapped, glaring up at the dragon. She had gone back to calmly humming and patting his head, definitely ignoring his displeasure.

“I think you should call her—”

“I’m not naming a dragon. Certainly not one that just fucking *threw up a dead fish*.”

“She’s trying to be nice, stop glaring at her.”

Wilbur looked at the fish, then glanced up at the dragon. “Dragon, I declare your name to be Dead Fish.”

“*Wilbur*—”

“Fine, fine. Uh...Salmon?”

Tommy gave him an unimpressed look. “You’re going to name a creature after what they eat. Real creative.”

“Grasshoppers spend their entire lives hopping through grass, don’t start with me.”

“At least give her something more...friendly, like Sally. Sally can be short for Salmon.”

Wilbur gave one final look up at the dragon. “Well? How does Sally sound?”

Sally gave him several pats on the head in response.

Chapter End Notes

This is quickly becoming my favorite project, if you couldn't tell.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Did I make up a whole plant for plot purposes? Yes, yes I did. Enjoy!

After their initial meeting with Tommy, Sally held Wilbur close for hours. She refused to let him go until the sun had gone down, and even then, it was only because she began to drift off and let her guard down.

“No, no. Sally, I’ll be here tomorrow,” Wilbur whispered as he put a hand on Sally’s snout, trying to quiet her. She was making calling sounds that were loud enough to wake the village. “I’ll be back soon, please just wait here.”

Sally looked as mournful as a dragon could get when Tommy and Wilbur finally left. Tommy was exhausted after the long day, but not tired enough that he couldn’t make witty quips.

“You have a new *mom*,” he whispered with a yawn, stumbling into Wilbur’s side.

“I do *not*,” Wilbur hissed. He put an arm around Tommy as they walked, keeping the boy from tripping over his own feet.

“Why else would she like you so much?” Tommy asked, mostly to himself. He was obviously too tired to expect a response, but Wilbur couldn’t help himself from answering.

“I...don’t know.”

Tommy yawned again, then sleepily shrugged. “Maybe ‘cos you’re both lonely.”

Wilbur turned to the boy in disbelief. “I am not *lonely*!”

Tommy gave him a *look* and shook his head, clearly done with the conversation.

Wilbur puzzled over the short talk for the rest of the journey, baffled by his brother’s comment. He wasn’t *lonely*. There was a difference between loneliness and independence. Wilbur did things on his own, Tommy knew that. He just preferred to be solitary, that’s all.

Wilbur gently opened the door to his home, wincing as it let out a loud squeak. He peered in to see Phil dozing in his armchair. He had apparently fallen asleep while waiting for his sons to come home. Letting out a quick sigh of relief, Wilbur pushed Tommy in front of him and crept around the swaying boy to softly shut the door.

He all but carried Tommy up the stairs, careful not to let anything wake Phil up. The chief would definitely have questions in the morning, but that was a problem for the future. With any luck, Wilbur could pretend he was sick or something, and Phil would leave him alone.

It was wishful thinking, but he could hope.

Tommy gave him a hug before heading off to his room. He paused at his door, which had a black bearskin tacked on the wood, and turned back to Wilbur. “I like Sally.”

Wilbur gave him a smile. “I like her, too.”

“G’night, Will.”

“Night, Tom.”

And with that, Tommy waved and ducked into his room, leaving Wilbur alone on the landing. He shook his head with a chuckle before heading to his own room.

His door didn't have his first kill on it like Tommy's did. A battered helmet with a massive pair of antlers crookedly hung from a peg, swinging slightly as he opened the door. It was a gift from his father, as well as a responsibility passed down by him. Phil had given it to him with the promise that this helmet would be the one he would wear as a chief. It matched Phil's helmet, as they were the pair of ceremonial helmets passed down through generations.

The hunk of metal and bone didn't look like much, but it certainly meant a lot.

Wilbur gently shut his door behind him, stretching as he turned to face his room.

It wasn't much, but it was *his*. A large desk stood against one wall, covered in maps and wood chips from where he sharpened his charcoal pencils. The wall behind it was draped with yellowed maps and torn pages from all sorts of books. The atlases were covered in markings and notes from his own hand, little reminders to himself about his quest to find a new home. A fresh X had been scrawled over a small island to the north, one that was labeled *Silent Danger*.

He hung his heavy cape on a hook by the door and made his way to his bed. He practically sank into the thick hides and furs covering the lumpy mattress. It was a welcome relief after the uncomfortable position he'd been stuck in for most of the day. Sally was soft at heart, but her scales were most definitely not.

A small alcove by his bed held a lantern that looked like it was near its end. *Phil must have lit it*, Wilbur mused, turning over to blow it out. His room went dark, and the only light left was streaming in through his window. The sky was clear tonight, but Jack had been complaining about his peg leg. When he said there was an itch in his fake foot, it usually meant rain was on its way.

Wilbur took a moment to appreciate the stars from his pillow before rolling over and calling it a night.

It felt like he had only closed his eyes for a second before he opened them again.

Sure enough, it was pouring outside his window. The falling droplets seemed to pound his window in particular as the wind whistled past.

Wilbur stood and looked outside, certain it wasn't just the rain that had woken him up. He'd lived on this island his whole life, a little rain wouldn't wake him up anymore.

There was nothing he could see through the rain, and his sleep-blurred vision wasn't helping him much, either. None of the trees around his home were close enough to knock into his window, and it was far too late for young Vikings to be throwing rocks at the house.

Wilbur shook his head and turned away. A sharp rapping sound interrupted his attempt to get back into bed, and he turned around to find a pair of yellow eyes peering at him intensely.

“*Sally*,” Wilbur hissed. He hurriedly unlocked the latch keeping his window shut and glared at the dragon. She poked her head in to bump his forehead when he threw the window open, ignoring his attempts to push her away.

“What are you *doing* here?” he whispered, glancing behind him to make sure no one was watching them. “Go back to the woods!”

Sally chirped and shook the water off of her head, drenching Wilbur in the process. He sighed and turned to grab his coat. “Fine, fine. I’ll walk you back to the—*Sally, no!*”

The dragon was trying to squeeze her way through the window, and she had both forelegs in before Wilbur whisper-yelled at her. She had the nerve to look completely unabashed at her discovery.

“Out, out, *out!*” he hissed, shoving Sally out of his room. The dragon squawked in protest and tried snaking her neck around Wilbur, but the Viking was adamant. He grabbed onto the spike on her snout and pulled her head down to look him in the eye. “Give me a minute, please.”

Sally awkwardly hung in the window as he rushed to layer clothing on, occasionally stretching her neck to sniff at his desk or look at whatever he was doing. Once he was sufficiently dressed, he finally managed to push her out of the window. The dragon scrambled for purchase on the roof, sending shingles down to the ground with a loud clatter.

“*Shhhh,*” Wilbur whispered, frantically looking around to see if anyone came to investigate the noise. “Sal, listen to me. Get off of the roof and go *home.*”

Sally cocked her head and stared at him. Then she huffed and picked him up, carrying him outside and into the rain. Wilbur flailed in her hold, choking back a panicked screech.

“Put me *down*, you stupid lizard!” he cried, trying to keep his volume down. Sally ignored him and nimbly jumped off of the roof, setting him down on the ground once they had landed.

She nudged him forward and ran ahead, clearly waiting for him to follow her. Wilbur shook his head and crossed his arms. The rain was already beginning to seep through his clothing, and he fought the urge to shiver where he stood.

Sally opened her mouth threateningly, preparing to sing to get him to listen to her. Wilbur scrambled to get to her side, unwilling to expose the village to Sally’s song. They’d kill her on the spot, mind-numbing song or not, and Wilbur... Wilbur found that he really did not like that idea.

The two ran through the freezing rain, with Wilbur desperately trying to keep up with his friend. He just *knew* Sally was slowing down for his sake as they left the village. She paused every time he had to lean against a tree and catch his breath, probably making sure he wouldn’t leave her again.

The rain only came down harder as they made their way through the trees, and Wilbur was shivering as he ran. When they finally stopped at the “Terror Tree”, as Tommy called it, he nearly collapsed. He felt completely frozen and wanted nothing more than his warm bed, but of course, he had to babysit his dragon.

His...dragon? His? Wilbur’s mind swirled as that mistake stuck out. It was a mistake, that was all. *The dragon, not his* dragon. That was a ridiculous idea anyways, having a *dragon* of all things.

“S-Sally, are y-you done n-now?” he managed to whisper through chattering teeth. He glared at the dragon that had forced him to walk through the pouring rain. “C-can I go h-home?”

Sally made a concerned crooning sound as she crept over to Wilbur. The Viking continued glaring at her as he shivered violently, too stubborn to admit that he was cold. Sally scooped him into her short forelegs and raised her wings like an umbrella over them both.

The dragon was *warm*, much warmer than he was. The deep, slow thump of Sally’s heart completely blocked out the rain. Wilbur could forget that he was in the middle of a rainstorm if he just focused on that steady beat. He was still shivering, but the warmth helped.

“Sal?”

The dragon looked at him intently.

“Take me home, will you?”

Sally opened her wings and took off, cradling Wilbur under her body so that he stayed dry. She glanced down at him every once in a while to make sure he was still alright, and her blue fins gave a happy flutter every time he said he was fine.

She landed on the roof of his home and set him down in his window frame. Wilbur winced as he realized he’d left the window open the entire time, expecting a wonderfully soggy room.

He slid into his room and grimaced as he landed in a small puddle on his floor.

He turned to Sally and gave her a pat on the snout. “Thanks, Sally.”

Wilbur gave the dragon a sleepy smile. The dragon cocked her head at the expression, then slowly quirked her lips to bare her teeth. Wilbur’s smile grew wider as Sally smiled back, and the two just grinned at each other until Wilbur gave a quiet chuckle and looked away.

“Go home, now. Stay safe.”

Sally blinked, then “smiled” at him again before pulling her head out of the window and gracefully taking off for the forest.

Wilbur latched his window shut as he watched her go, only turning away when he couldn’t make out her bright yellow scales anymore.

He took off his soaked clothes and hung them back on a hook. He sneezed as he settled in bed, which made him groan in annoyance. *Amazing*, he thought. *Sally’s also made me sick.*

How else could she make his life any harder?

As it turned out, she could make his life *much* harder.

When he had woken up with a slight cold, Phil had saved him from the brunt of his scolding and just sighed. Apparently, Wilbur’s sickness was punishment enough.

He was sent to help Jack again, as Phil didn't want him to overexert himself and make the sickness worse. Wilbur tried to protest, but the chief ignored him and gave Wilbur a stack of weapons for Jack to fix.

Now, he was sullenly helping the smith by doing virtually nothing. Jack never *needed* help, but he was always grateful to have someone pass him his tools. Wilbur wasn't allowed anywhere near the forge. Phil and Jack had both agreed that that was a disaster waiting to happen.

Wilbur, unfortunately, saw their point.

He barely held back another sneeze as he handed Jack a hammer. The smith glared at him as if Wilbur had just licked the hammer in front of him.

"I'm not *trying* to sneeze," Wilbur muttered.

Jack shook his head with a sigh, his angry expression mellowing into one of sympathy. "I know, but maybe you should take a break. You've been working hard around here, no one would fault you for taking some rest."

"I would fault myself," Wilbur replied, rolling up his sleeves with a sniffle. "I have a *duty*."

Jack watched him hurl scrap metal around the forge, lashing the piles with rope and determined vigor. The smith opened his mouth to try scolding the man again, but Wilbur shot him a look. Jack turned away without another word, returning to his work. It was simpler than dealing with Wilbur when he couldn't be swayed, that was for sure.

Wilbur cleared a shelf of dust and battered blades, allowing sunlight to stream in past Sally's face.

He took a double take at the sight of the dragon perched in the window. Sally was in the village in broad daylight, where anyone could see her. It was a wonder no one *had* caught

wind of her yet; she wasn't exactly *small*.

Wilbur shoved the broken weapons back on the shelf, blocking the dragon from sight. He pushed past Jack, nearly knocking the man into the forge. “On second thought, I think I’ll take a walk. Thanks, Jack!”

“Wilbur—”

Wilbur had already dashed around the back of the smithy, giving Jack a distracted wave. Sally was clawing lightly at the window, trying to find Wilbur. She made an excited snorting sound when she saw the Viking staring at her.

“What the fuck was *that*?” Jack called, craning his neck around the doorway of the forge.

“I—uh. I sneezed, sorry!” Wilbur replied hastily, pushing Sally away from the window.

“That sounded like a dragon belch, you sure you’re alright?”

“Never better!”

Sally stumbled as Wilbur continued shoving her away from the forge, indignantly squawking as she found her footing. Wilbur winced at how loud she was. Luckily, the forge was on a corner of the village, so if they stayed on the side of the building, no one would see them. The forest was just a few hundred yards away; Sally could fly into there in the blink of an eye.

“*Go home*,” Wilbur hissed, giving one last push. He sneezed again and had to rest a hand on the wall to steady himself, coughing into his fist. Waving off Sally’s concerned warbles, he weakly pushed Sally’s snout away. “I’m *fine*. Go back before they see you, you stupid lizard.”

Sally cocked her head and gave him an odd look before flapping away. Wilbur cringed as her wings loudly beat against the air, glancing back to the forge to see if Jack noticed. Thankfully, he could make out the smith clanging and banging inside his shop without a care in the world.

Wilbur cleared his throat and started off towards his home, not wanting to make Jack any more suspicious by suddenly appearing again. It was better if he got farther from the village anyways, in case Sally decided to return *again*.

Tommy and Phil weren't home when he walked in. Tommy was probably in the woods with his dragons, and Phil was most likely down at the docks. They were actually being useful. Wilbur didn't doubt that Tommy was keeping the dragons from pestering the village. The boy kept the beasts busy and distracted while they rebuilt. Vikings had been making remarks all week about how they had hardly seen any Terrors around the livestock, and Wilbur hadn't missed the satisfied look on Tommy's face every time it was brought up.

Phil, on the other hand, was desperately trying to restock the fish that had been heavily depleted after the last raid. He had either been rebuilding or in his room, writing letters pleading for assistance. According to the chief, reinforcements were due to arrive next week.

Wilbur had been briefed on this as if *he* would be the one in charge of the extra men. The thought of being in command of his own village sickened him, let alone another group of Vikings entirely.

He could tell Jack about his "duty" all day, but when it came down to it, Wilbur didn't want that duty. He avoided looking at the helmet on his door as he walked into his room.

As he collapsed in his bed, he cast a glance toward the maps covering his walls with a sigh. The only thing he could do to prolong his reign was make sure his father didn't die. Phil would go down with his village, just like their fishermen would go down with their ships. The stubborn chief would never leave his people...but Wilbur had no such qualms. Each scribble and word on those yellowed atlases was proof of his deceit. He went out further and further into the world, a fleeting escape from the pressure of his future that never lasted long enough.

Wilbur rubbed his face tiredly, letting his thoughts melt away. He could blame the sickness for such ridiculous notions...but even he couldn't be that deep in denial.

A knocking sound made him sit up abruptly. He scowled as he turned to his window, ready to tell Sally off for the third time, but he stopped in his tracks when he saw the dragon holding a leafy branch. Wilbur unlatched the window as he studied the plant, trying to figure out what Sally had brought him.

When the window was ajar, Sally dropped the branch into his arms and nudged it towards his chest. She gave him a shaky "smile" and left before he could ask what she was doing.

The plant in his hands looked vaguely familiar, but he couldn't put a name to the leaves. The twigs were a bright red color that contrasted sharply against the greenish blue leaves it held. Wilbur knew he'd seen it in the forests on occasion, clustered in bushes under the tall ferns.

He set it on his bed and walked to one of his shelves overfilled with books and papers, searching for one of his ancestor's journals about the island. Books and letters fell to the floor as he tore through his collection, making a racket that would've concerned his family if they were home. Wilbur ignored the mess and continued searching, finally landing on a yellowed tome with a ragged cover.

He flipped through the pages, stopping at the first burst of bright red.

Dragonsbane, the caption read. A woody herb that heals Vikings, but is fatal for most dragons. Terrible Terrors have been observed to die within hours after ingesting the plant that cures so many of our ailments. If those hardy beasts can't stand it, I doubt any other—

Wilbur shut the book with a snap, having read enough. He glanced at the dragonsbane on his bed, then back at the book in his hands. Either Sally was immune to the bane of her kind, or she had risked her life to...he didn't want to dwell on that.

Wilbur took the crimson branch and brought it downstairs to make some sort of medicine from it. As he stared at the medicinal plant, memories came flooding back to him of his

father using it for teas. Phil had used it for headaches on late nights, but surely with this leafy miracle Wilbur could mellow his cold as well.

His mind kept turning to the danger Sally had put herself in for his little cold. A plant that could kill her but would give him quick comfort...that couldn't be worth it. *He* couldn't be worth it. The question of how she even knew that would help him was puzzling enough as it was. She must've had some contact with people before him; it would explain her friendliness at the very least.

Wilbur shook his head as he took the kettle off of the fire, pouring steaming water into a mug with the dragonsbane leaves. Phil came into the room as he stirred the mixture.

“Did you pick up some fresh dragonsbane for us? Haven’t had this in the house for ages!” Phil laughed, coming over to squeeze Wilbur’s shoulder. “Good lad. That tea right there will fix you up in no time, this thing is a miracle. Wouldn’t hurt to have some around the house again, it’s just as effective as a sword against dragons.”

Wilbur weakly laughed along with his father, keeping his eyes on the floor.

Sure enough, Wilbur’s head felt clearer by the next day. He brewed himself another mug of tea, unable to keep a smile of disbelief off of his face.

Tommy gave him a strange look at breakfast, asking what the Hel had happened to make Wilbur so happy.

“A miracle visited me last night,” Wilbur replied with a laugh, patting Tommy’s shoulder as he walked out the door. “Two of them, actually!”

Tommy opened his mouth to reply, but he elected to shut it and just shake his head. “Whatever you say, Wilbur.”

Wilbur practically ran into the woods as the sun rose, uncharacteristically energetic at this hour. Tommy's Terrors were barely awake by the time he skidded into their clearing, calling for Sally. They gave him an annoyed look before flying off, clearly upset that they had been awoken so early and abruptly.

Sally crawled out of the woods sleepily, blinking in the early sunlight as she stepped forward. She gave a surprised huff as Wilbur tackled her into a hug, staggering to the side as the man held onto her chest.

“You’re really something, aren’t you?” Wilbur asked, looking up into the dragon’s perplexed face. “Really, really something.”

Sally awkwardly lifted a leg to pat his back, making a confused trill as Wilbur let go. He stepped back and laughed, gesturing to the dragon. “You’re incredible!”

Sally watched him tell her she was an amazing creature over and over with a slightly terrified expression. She looked like she thought Wilbur had lost his mind.

He hadn’t, not at all. If anything, he felt a sense of clarity. Wilbur stopped his praises and just smiled at the amazing dragon. *His* amazing dragon.

His dragon...an unbelievable phrase, but he could get used to that.

It had a nice ring to it.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Ooooo I updated some tags!!

After the incident with dragonsbane, Wilbur began visiting Sally whenever he could.

She had settled in a large hollow on one of the most remote places on the island, safely hidden from any prying eyes. A small lake sat in the center of the hollow, with trees surrounding it on all sides. The climb down was rocky at best, but it was always worth it. If Wilbur took too long, Sally could always fly up and grab him.

The hollow was decorated with spikes of amber, and Sally had created a small island in the center of the lake for herself. The spherical cocoon was smaller than her previous nest, but it was much more welcoming. She would hoard anything Wilbur gave her, placing it in a neat pile in the corner of her nest for safekeeping.

Wilbur enjoyed seeing that the flowers and shiny stones he had brought her were so well-loved. She loved her shiny things, and the island had plenty of those to offer.

Most days, he would simply sit under the shade of the trees surrounding the lake and sketch Sally as she did whatever she wanted. The Book of Dragons had nothing on her kind, so he had no way to identify her. But with Tommy's and his own exposure to peaceful dragons, he decided to make his own copy of the Book of Dragons.

He wasn't an artist, not by any means, but if Sally stayed still for long enough he could sketch something that looked dragon-like. She seemed to like any pictures he made, anyways.

After a few weeks, he couldn't think of anything else to add to Sally's entry into his personal Book of Dragons, so he set his books and charcoal pencils aside and looked for something else to do while keeping Sally company.

His gaze happened to land on the guitar in the corner of his room, one that was covered with dust and probably very out of tune.

Wilbur hadn't played his mother's old instrument in years, not since Phil had emphasized the need to focus on interacting with other Vikings. Apparently, staying in your room and playing "a pretty piece of wood" wasn't chief-like behavior.

But while Phil was busy rebuilding all the time, Wilbur could sneak off with the guitar. It wasn't like the chief had any spare time to scold him for being so absent, even though he could clearly see how much the man wanted to. Every time they passed each other in the village, Phil would open his mouth to say something about Wilbur's frequent disappearances, and Wilbur would dart away before he could get a word out.

Was it mature? No, no it wasn't.

But did Wilbur have any regrets? No, no he didn't.

Today, he was taking his guitar down to Sally to see what she would think of it. She was very sensitive to sound, so he had made sure to tune it last night. If Sally heard something she didn't like, she would spit amber at it, and Wilbur liked his guitar too much to let it get crystallized.

"Sal!" he called from the edge of the hollow, waving to the dragon below. She was sitting in the sun atop her ball-shaped nest, basking in the only warmth the island could provide. At the sound of Wilbur's voice, she raised her head and angled her blue head-fins towards the man. Sally flicked her tail in greeting, sort of like how a Viking would wave at another.

Wilbur grinned and began climbing the uneven slope down to the lake, clambering over tree trunks and vines aplenty. He held the guitar strap tightly, making sure the instrument wouldn't fall during his descent.

Eventually, he jumped off of the last ledge and into the pile of needles below, kicking up a spray of dirt at the impact. “Come here, I have something to show you!”

He could hear Sally grumbling about leaving her basking spot, and he laughed at her troubles. “It’s a quick surprise, I know you’ll love it.”

Wilbur met her at the strip of green land between the forest and the lake. Sally stood in the shallows of the lake, watching him with an unimpressed look. He didn’t usually show up this early, and he almost never interrupted her basking time. She shifted around impatiently, and then she saw the strange shape attached to Wilbur’s back.

Wilbur let her inspect the guitar, chuckling as she huffed in satisfaction. Once she had deemed it fit for her approval, she crawled onto the shore to lay down and wait for Wilbur to do something interesting.

Wilbur sat against her side, pulling the guitar into his lap. Sally rested her head next to him, studying the instrument. Wilbur gently strummed the guitar, and her pupils dilated within an instant.

All at once, Sally was suddenly more interested in the instrument. Now that it had made an appealing sound, she was much more invested in what it would do. Wilbur slowly moved his fingers to make a few chords, trying to remember all of the ones Phil had told him about.

His mother had...left before she could actually teach him how to play, but Phil tried his best with what he remembered watching his late wife do.

Sally tentatively raised a claw to poke at the strings, weaving her short foreleg under his arm and across his lap. She looked at him for permission, and Wilbur nodded. “Softly, though,” he warned.

Sally delicately plucked a string with her talon, and narrowed her eyes as it let out a sharp twang instead of the soft music she had heard earlier. She glared at Wilbur in betrayal as she

gave an annoyed warble.

“*Gently*, Sally,” Wilbur chuckled, slowly bringing his hand across the strings. Sally watched him and tried again, brushing a claw over the strings. It made a much better sound than before, and Sally trilled in excitement. She did it again, quicker this time, and another grating noise came out of it.

Sally’s fins flapped in confusion, and she hissed at the guitar like it had personally offended her. She gave up trying to play the instrument and rolled over onto her other side, dismissing Wilbur and his guitar entirely.

Wilbur laughed and continued practicing chords. When he stopped to stretch his fingers, Sally’s tail gently whacked his shoulder.

“Do you want me to keep playing?” Wilbur teased. Sally grumbled from where she lay, poking him with her tail fins.

He obliged and kept practicing, eventually moving on to play slow songs to get used to switching chords again. He hummed to himself as he practiced, and after a while Sally began to join in, rumbling a deep harmony.

By the time his fingers were sore and red at the tips, Sally had decided she approved of the guitar once again. Wilbur set the guitar down with a deep exhale, and Sally attempted plucking the strings again. She was able to gingerly strum the thin cords a few times, and then she stopped, satisfied with her playing for the day.

Wilbur tilted his head up to look at the sky with a contented sigh, watching the clouds drift by. It was still morning, and Tommy wouldn’t come looking for him to pester him for a while yet.

As he stared at the sky, a crazy idea started to form in his mind. Sure, Sally had carried him through the sky, but that was completely undignified. What if he...no, that was impossible, right?

Wilbur jolted up with a start, the guitar long forgotten. He patted Sally's side as she stared at him in confusion, watching him inspect her neck. He sat down on her neck, right in front of her front of one of the spines on her back. He looked at where his legs lay, frowning as he noticed how close they were to her shoulders. *Would they get in her way?*

Wilbur was so focused on where he sat, shifting around to get comfortable, that he didn't realize Sally getting up off of the ground. One moment, Wilbur was certain he was on the ground, and the next, Sally had given a strong flap of her wings.

The dragon catapulted herself into the sky, ignoring the petrified rider on her back. *At the very least, Wilbur thought weakly, my legs aren't in the way of her wings.*

Wilbur shut his eyes tightly, quietly begging Sally to take them down. "Sally, Sal, dragon of mine, please oh *please* just get me off of this ride," he whispered, hugging Sally's neck in an attempt to keep himself from falling off. The wind carried away his words, though, and Sally flapped her wings faster.

He opened his eyes just a fraction, and his stomach dropped when he saw how far above the ground they were. Sally didn't seem to be slowing down, either.

She did a small flip in the air, which made Wilbur's head spin, before gliding towards the ocean beyond his island. Wilbur held on even tighter as soon as they were above open water, absolutely terrified of falling into the ocean below. The impact *alone* would most certainly kill him, and even if it didn't, he would succumb quickly to the shock of the cold water.

Sally finally noticed his fear and slowed down, lowering herself to ride the air currents coming off of the ocean's surface. After a few minutes of smooth riding, Wilbur opened his eyes again to see the water much closer than before. He relaxed slightly, but he continued holding Sally's neck in a death grip.

The dragon wound around stone pillars rising out of the ocean, gracefully dipping and weaving around the rocky structures. Once the initial motion sickness had worn off, Wilbur found that he *liked* it. Sally was obviously showing off, but it wasn't tight turns and stomach-

churning flips. She went back to gliding and looked back at him, giving him one of her toothy “smiles” when he saw how awestruck he looked.

Wilbur gently leaned downward, and Sally obeyed, dipping closer to the ocean. Wilbur slowly let go of Sally’s neck with one hand, lowering his shaking fingers into the water below. It was surreal to see the water flowing past his hand as Sally glided on, and Wilbur drew back his hand after a moment and stared at it in disbelief.

Sally took that as a sign to go higher, so she gave one strong flap of her wings and ascended, soaring directly into the clouds above. Wilbur screeched as she nearly went vertical, once again holding onto her neck with a vice-like grip.

She flew through the clouds, and Wilbur’s screams died in his throat. His face and hair were damp from the water vapor in the clouds, and that wash of cool moisture had felt like the most refreshing thing in the world.

Now, though, he was even more stunned than before.

It was like they had flown into an entirely different world. There was nothing but open sky in front and above them, and soft white clouds below their flight. It was peacefully serene and silent above the cloud cover, no bustle of a Viking village or even the sound of birds all the way up here. The slight rustling of Sally’s wings cutting through the air was the only sound that pierced the atmosphere, and Wilbur barely noticed it anyways.

Sally was once again looking at him, almost like she was seeking his approval. Wilbur grinned and laughed, throwing his arms wide and letting the wind buffet him as they glided along. “This is wonderful, Sally!” he called, closing his eyes and basking in the pure peace that existed in this layer of the horizon.

Sally snorted in amusement. She tilted from side to side, letting the tips of her wings touch the clouds that passed by.

It was *ethereal* up here. There were really no words to describe the bliss that was the bright, sunny silence of the sky. Wilbur relished the peace. It was almost exactly what he had been

craving for so long, a quiet place that was guaranteed no interruptions.

Far above the island he had lived on for all of his life, Wilbur felt like he was *home*.

“Thank you,” he murmured, leaning down to rub Sally’s neck. She flicked a fin in acknowledgement, letting out a pleased rumble as she enjoyed the serenity as well.

They stayed like that for a while, each of them in their own little worlds as they flew above the world. Carefree and without direction, they soared across the expanse of clouds without pause, occasionally spotting a patch of water through gaps in the pure whiteness beneath them.

Suddenly, all of that was interrupted as Sally stopped, hovering in the air. Her great wingstrokes whisked the clouds around them as her head darted around, looking for something Wilbur hadn’t sensed yet.

“What’s wrong, Sal?” he whispered, rubbing her neck in an attempt to calm her down. She snorted and dove, cutting through the cloud cover to get to whatever was below. Wilbur held on, pressing himself against her neck to hide. Whatever had spooked a dragon like Sally must be dangerous.

The cloud cover seemed to go deeper here, thinning out into a fog that made it hard to see anything but silhouettes in the distance. Wilbur squinted as he peered around, trying to find what had made Sally so antsy.

Sally abruptly ducked down, landing onto a boulder that barely rose above the ocean waves. She picked Wilbur up and off of her neck, then shielded him with a wing.

“Sally, what are you—”

Sally slapped her tail over his mouth before he could say another word, and then she went still.

There was a tense silence as Wilbur waited for some monstrous dragon or worse to approach. His heart pounded in his chest, and judging by how Sally's body shook, hers was equally as frantic.

He slowly raised Sally's wing above his head to see the blurry figure of a ship headed towards them, a crude carving of a dragon's head perched at the bow of the boat. Flashes of light came from the ship's deck, as well as some angry yells.

As soon as Wilbur heard a dragon's roar, his heart skipped a beat. *Trappers*.

Trappers rarely came to his home, as they preferred to catch dragons themselves. The dead dragons they kept in the shoreside cave were for the Vikings to trade scales and talons from. The rest of the dragon was unusable, as most dragons were poisonous to Vikings, and the carcasses would be tossed into the ocean.

Trappers, though, they were *brutal*. Capturing an island's worth of dragons and caging them, then sending them off to be slaves or pets to the highest bidders. Everything had a price tag to them, and the lower a dragon's worth was, the lower its chance of survival was as well. Not to mention the dismal cage environments of the dragons.

A month ago, Wilbur wouldn't have cared about the caged dragons. He might've even said they'd deserved it. But now, after weeks with a dragon he was sure trappers would *love* to get their hands on, he felt rage at the very idea. The thought of Sally in a dirty, cramped cage, surrounded by overwhelming and unpleasant sounds and barely fed enough to survive...it was too much to bear.

As the ship drew closer, Wilbur could make out what the Vikings on board were shouting.

"But *why* do we have to bring these dragons all the way there? They're hard to keep up with, and we won't get paid *shit* for—"

“Listen here, you grimy *lout*. We’re bringing the cream of the crop to Chief Philza because he’s desperate, not fucking *stupid*. If we show him we can wrangle these sorts of beasts, he’ll have to let us in. I haven’t been able to get my hands on any of the strains on this side of the archipelago because of those damned *dragon riders*, but Philza’s village is just out of their reach,” a smaller Viking barked, making his opponent cower with the venom laced in his words. “If I hear another word of complaint out of *any of you*, I’ll let the dragons deal with you. Am I understood?”

“Yes, Big Q!” the trappers chorused immediately. The short Viking, or ‘Big Q’ huffed and walked out of view, ordering the trappers around the dragons as the poor creatures fought for their freedom.

Wilbur blinked as he realized what the trapper had said. His father was desperate enough to ask for *trappers*? If trappers came anywhere near his island, Sally would have to leave. But Sally clearly wouldn’t leave him, so he would have to come with her. But he *couldn’t* leave, because Phil and Tommy needed him there.

He had to convince his father that the trappers shouldn’t be allowed anywhere close to the island. For Sally’s sake, if not his own.

Sally, meanwhile, was as silent and unmoving as a statue, her yellow eyes focused on the ship’s hull as it passed by. She turned her head over so slightly behind them, and Wilbur whipped around to see a flaming dragon coming near them.

The Monstrous Nightmare barreled onto the deck of the trappers’ ship, roaring as it set the ship ablaze. The ship erupted into chaos, with trappers shrieking and dragons bellowing as the Nightmare spread destruction wherever it stepped.

A person jumped off of the Nightmare, unscathed by the flames. They drew their sword and began fighting off any trappers that came close to their dragon, allowing the Nightmare to burn and rip off the locks of the cages.

As dragons began to fly off of the ship and into freedom, Sally lowered her neck and waited for Wilbur to climb on. Her eyes never strayed from the fiery decks.

Wilbur pressed himself to Sally's neck once again as they watched the battle unfold.

The trappers were clearly, and thankfully, losing to the rider and their dragon. Almost all of the dragons had been freed, and nearly every trapper had been incapacitated. Only one still stood against the rider, the trapper the others had called Big Q.

“Why can’t you mind your own damn business?” he shrieked, loading his crossbow and pointing it at the dragon rider. “This isn’t even your territory!”

“It doesn’t matter *where* you go, I will follow,” the rider replied, taking off their helmet to reveal a head of pink hair. Wilbur’s eyes widened as he watched the woman stalk closer towards Big Q. “I will *never* let you go.”

Big Q seemed to recognize her, and he threw back his head and laughed. “I guess we didn’t finish off your pathetic village, after all!” he exclaimed, setting the crossbow. “I think it’s time to *fix* that.”

The Monstrous Nightmare pushed its rider out of the way of the bolt with a growl, and the shot went wide. Its fiery scales sputtered out as it succumbed to exhaustion, swaying slightly. The rider jumped onto her dragon, clearly sensing it was time to leave. “Until next time, Scarface,” she sneered.

“My name is Quackity, Son of Quackity!” Big Q bellowed, loading and firing another crossbow bolt. The dragon dodged the bolt with ease and flapped away, its rider ignoring the trapper’s screams.

Sally took that moment to flee as well, quickly flying into the cloud cover. With how fast she ascended, Wilbur hoped that it was enough to keep them out of sight.

Quackity watched the dragons fly away, seething as he gripped his useless crossbow. A flash of yellow appeared in the corner of his eye, and he turned to catch a glimpse of a dragon disappearing into the clouds.

Quackity's eyes narrowed. He'd never seen a dragon like that on this side of the archipelago. No dragon that large or that colorful should be out here.

Someone else, some *other* rider had been watching him.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Hallo! Longer chapter today. Also! I describe Quackity's scar in this chapter, and it is...not the prettiest. Stay safe!

The flight back to the island was tense, to say the least.

Sally's and Wilbur's peaceful moment in the clouds was over. The pure, heart-stopping fear that Wilbur had felt completely ruined any hope of relaxation. Sally wasn't playing in the clouds anymore, either. She flew in a straight course to the island, determined to beat the setting sun in a race to touch the tips of the island's hills first.

She obviously won, and Wilbur felt a small flicker of pride beneath the writhing anxiety in his gut.

Wilbur dismounted Sally shakily, stumbling around as he tried to find his bearings. Riding a dragon was like sailing a ship, less stable than walking was. He leaned against a tree for a few minutes, trying to get used to the still environment around him.

As soon as he had stabilized himself, he began pacing back and forth. Sally watched with a concerned expression, sitting back on her haunches to study him as he worriedly walked around.

Trappers would be coming to the island, which meant danger. If they found Sally here, she would almost certainly be taken away. Wilbur had known the dragon for only a few weeks, but the thought of her being taken was too much for him.

Sally deserved the freedom she had now, the ability to soar and stretch among clouds and stars above. Taking away a dragon's flight... Wilbur could only imagine it was like taking away his ability to walk. A dragon's powerful wings practically defined them as the terrifying, awe-inspiring creatures they were.

To cage one was unthinkable, but trappers had been doing just that for decades.

Worse still, if they found Sally, they would find *him*. Sally was always close by, and he just knew she would go to protect him before herself. If the village found out he had been consorting with their mortal enemy, he would be killed on the spot. Exile was another option, but Wilbur would rather die than never be allowed to see Tommy or his home ever again.

Wilbur stopped in front of Sally and stared at her, trying to find some answer in her eyes. She met his gaze and cocked her head to the side, making a puzzled chirping sound.

Wilbur wasn't a great warrior; he wouldn't stand a chance against seasoned trappers. He could barely keep Sally a secret from his own father as it was, much less an entire crew of trappers.

Escape, his mind whispered. *Fly away and don't look back.*

It was cowardly. It was a choice that would shatter the fragile peace his family had finally attained after years of grief. It was selfish, wrong, and had only a slim chance of success.

But it was better than surrender or nothing at all.

"What if we left?" Wilbur asked, mostly to himself. Sally leaned in closer to hear him better, giving Wilbur an encouraging warble. "What if we left all of this?"

As Wilbur gave more credit to the idea, small cogs in his brain began to turn over new thoughts. "We could take Tommy!" he exclaimed, running a hand through his hair. A small smile began to grow on his face as he thought of additions to the fantastical thought. "He

could run away with us, and he could take the dragons! Then we would all be safe, and Phil...Phil."

His smile dropped as his voice trailed away. *Phil*. The chief had already lost his wife and a son to dragons, and he had been devastated for years after that. If he learned he was losing the rest of his family to the same beasts, he might just snap.

It was a selfish choice.

Phil would be destroyed if they left with no warning, he might even hate them for abandoning him. He would have no heir to the village, no legacy to pass on for the people.

It was a hurtful choice.

But really...would Phil ever understand this? Would he ever understand that Wilbur had broken through the walls separating the Vikings from their enemies? Or would he condemn Wilbur for simply trying to be peaceful?

Would Phil make him an example to the village, or would his father listen to him for once?

Wilbur grimaced as he turned away from Sally, bundling his coat around him as he prepared to climb the wall out of the hollow. Whatever the answer to that might be, it wasn't a risk worth taking.

When Wilbur stepped through the door, he was greeted by a very worried Phil.

"Where *were* you?" Phil demanded, hugging Wilbur in a rib-cracking embrace. The chief led them to the fireplace, pointing at Wilbur's usual chair. "Sit. Tell me what you did today."

Wilbur sat in the chair slowly, trying to stall as his mind came up with a list of excuses he could use. He wasn't the best at lying, especially not to his father, but he would feel less guilty if he told a half-truth instead. "I was clearing my head, you know. Preparing for the future."

Phil raised an eyebrow as he sat opposite his son, taking a knife from his belt and wiping it off with a rag that hung on the arm of his chair. "The future?"

Wilbur nodded, swallowing as he tried to keep himself from slouching. "The future. You said you were thinking of giving me some more responsibilities and all."

Phil studied him as he continued to polish his blade, suspicion etched into the lines of his face. Wilbur met his gaze steadily, unwilling to back down. He'd already spun his tale, and now he would have to weave the thread he's created.

"So, who are the reinforcements coming in?"

After a moment of painful silence, Phil's face relaxed and he leaned back in his chair comfortably. "I called in a favor. Some...trappers should arrive here in the next few days."

"Trappers?" Wilbur echoed, hoping his voice conveyed enough shock. He didn't have to fake it, though. Even though he'd heard Big Q talking about the arrangement, it was still hard to believe that his father would get this desperate.

Phil nodded grimly, sheathing his knife. "Desperate times call for desperate measures. We alone aren't enough to stop the foul beasts. If they find out we're capturing them, maybe they'll stop coming."

"I wouldn't come back, that's for sure," Wilbur muttered, and Phil gave him a tight smile.

“Aye. What I want you to do is keep an eye on them. They know their job, but trappers are a nasty bunch. I don’t trust them as far as I can throw them, and it’d be wise of you to be wary, too.”

Wilbur crossed his arms. “So you want *me* to keep them in line?” he asked. “Dad, they could easily toss me overboard if they wanted to.”

Phil threw back his head and roared with laughter. “That they could! But they should know better than to mess with my son.”

The guilt that had been clawing at his chest grew just a bit more painful as he heard the care in Phil’s voice. “Why me? Jack is much better at yelling at people.”

Phil reached over to put a hand on Wilbur’s shoulder. “Because you, Wilbur, will be the next chief. A chief’s work is never what we *want* to do, but it must be done. Better for you to learn that now, with rough trappers, than never at all.”

Wilbur’s heart sank as he watched Phil’s expression go from that of a kind father to one a formal chief in a matter of seconds. The guilt faded as a glimpse of Phil’s priorities came to the surface, but that felt worse, in a way.

“If you had to choose, would it be me or the village?”

Phil didn’t even hesitate. “The village, right now. You can take care of yourself, and I need to take care of my people.”

Wilbur’s heart stuttered in his chest, and he blinked away the small tears forming in his eyes. “Oh.”

Phil clapped him on the shoulder, unaware of the internal turmoil his son was going through. “Sometimes we have to make sacrifices, you know? But I trust you, and I know you’ll make me proud.”

Wilbur smiled, but he felt no joy. He stood up slowly, hiding his shaking hands behind his back. “Can’t wait,” he replied weakly, turning to go up the stairs.

“Wilbur,” Phil called, stopping Wilbur in his tracks. “No pressure. You’ll do great.”

The firm belief in his father’s voice nearly made Wilbur break down right then and there, but he managed to stiffly nod before practically running up the stairs. He wanted to escape the tension Phil didn’t even see, and he wanted to escape the double-life he was living.

Phil said Wilbur would make him proud, but Wilbur could already taste the inevitable disappointment.

Wilbur didn’t have enough time to plan his escape before the trappers were due to arrive, but the thought never left his mind as he prepared the village for the guests.

He was waiting to get Tommy alone, but Tommy was put to work just like Wilbur was, sweeping paths, cleaning stables, and sorting the forge. All Wilbur needed was a moment, but a moment was the only thing he couldn’t get.

He’d already spent an entire morning tiredly trying to convince a Viking family to give up their home for the trappers. They’d been stubborn and crass about it, as expected, but Wilbur managed to negotiate with them. An extra supply of fish and a free battleaxe was all it took to make the family happy, and they moved their things into the hut next door with their neighbors.

Jack probably wasn’t going to be pleased to part with one of his beloved weapons for the low price of nothing, but Wilbur would deal with that later.

The days leading up to the trappers' arrival were painfully long. Wilbur wouldn't come home until well after sunset, and he would be too tired to work up the courage to talk to Tommy about his plan. Sally, however, was right at his window when he staggered into his room.

After Wilbur had abruptly stopped visiting her, she came over to see him herself. She had sniffed him thoroughly several times, making worried crooning sounds. Wilbur had reassured her that he wasn't sick again; he was just exhausted. Sally didn't seem to like that response at all, and she stayed with him as he fell asleep.

She'd always vanish before he woke up, but he had slept more soundly than most nights with her watching over him. It was a security he didn't know he needed, and one he felt childish for enjoying so much. Someone was *there* for him, with no other duty than to help him.

Phil, unfortunately, couldn't provide that.

The chief had been so busy with preparations that he was barely at home anymore. Wilbur caught glimpses of him running around the village, and he occasionally checked in on Wilbur, but that was about as much interaction as Wilbur got with Phil. He understood it, he really did, and it made his plan easier.

The day the trappers were supposed to arrive was especially hectic. Vikings were running around the village carrying decorative wreaths, their best axes, or particularly plump chickens to display outside of their homes. Vikings were stubborn, sure, but they were also prideful. No matter how dire their situation was, Wilbur's village made sure that everything looked as welcoming as possible.

Everyone froze when a cry came up from the docks. "*Ship spotted making port!*"

No one moved a muscle, and then the chaos began again. The flurry of action became a blizzard, and Wilbur found himself lost in the crowd of frantic Vikings.

He helped out where he could, hanging maces and flowers alike from balconies and doorframes, or clearing up disputes among the stressed Vikings. A man bumped into another

by accident, knocking a bouquet out of his arms, and Wilbur thought they might've ripped each other's throats out if he hadn't intervened.

A small platform was raised in the centre of the village, lined with proudly battered shields on every side. A shield that looked like it had seen many battles was far more impressive than one that had not, at least to the average Viking.

At long last, the foreign ship threw down its anchor and slowly floated up to the docks. The Vikings finished their last minute preparations and pretended to go about their everyday lives. Their casual demeanour was ruined by the tension in their shoulders and the way they were constantly craning their necks to look for their guests.

Wilbur turned away from the village and set off for the woods, planning to check on Sally for the last time, but Phil grabbed him by the collar of his tunic and dragged him down to the docks. “*Dad!*” Wilbur gasped, struggling to free himself from his father’s tight grip. “What are you *doing*? ”

“We’re going to go meet our guests,” Phil hissed, plastering a smile onto his face as he passed some Vikings. “You’re going to supervise them, so you need to greet them before everyone else.”

Wilbur finally fought his way out of Phil’s grasp and groaned. He followed his father, rubbing his aching neck. “Fine. Where’s Tommy?”

“Already down by the docks, I figure. He said he wanted to help unload the ships.”

Wilbur raised an eyebrow but stayed silent. Tommy never *just* wanted to help, he always had some ulterior motive hidden up his sleeve. He wondered what the young Viking had planned this time.

Phil paused behind a rock, turning to Wilbur. He straightened his son’s vest and cloak, running a hand through Wilbur’s hair as well. One he deemed Wilbur fit for viewing, he rolled his shoulders back and nodded at his son. “Ready?”

“...as I’ll ever be.”

The pair walked down to the docks with a calm air of formality, holding themselves in identically stiff poses. They kept their backs straight and their hands clasped behind their backs as they turned a corner, slowly strolling across the damp bridges of the docks. To slip would be an embarrassment, so they kept their pace measured.

The trappers were unboarding their ship, stretching as they touched down on the docks. Wilbur could see them already sizing up the island, scrutinizing the rugged landscape and the tips of the houses they could see from where they stood.

Big Q stood in the front, ordering his men to stop standing around like fat scarecrows and help unload the ship. He turned to the two men coming to greet him, and a smile slid over his features.

Wilbur didn’t like it one bit. It felt oily and untrustworthy, the sort of an expression that didn’t belong on a Viking’s face. It didn’t help that one of his eyes was hidden under a silky patch, hiding half of his true emotions. Wilbur couldn’t read the man well, and that scared him.

Thankfully, Phil stepped in front of him and outstretched a hand, a much warmer grin benign given to the visitor. “Welcome to our home, Quackity, Son of Quackity.”

Quackity took the man’s hand and shook it firmly. “An honour, Chief Philza the Brave. Thank you for giving my men a worthy task.”

The exchange was tense and unnatural. If either man had less composure, Wilbur was certain that they would’ve already had their blades out and ready to kill.

He stiffened when Quackity turned to him, his stomach turning as the snake-like smile was directed at him. “And you are...?”

Wilbur stepped up with a small smirk, outstretching his own hand. “Wilbur. Heir of this fine island, and the one who will be taking care of you all.”

Quackity’s grin flickered, and something dangerous flashed in his eyes. He obviously didn’t like the thought of being taken care of, but Wilbur wasn’t going to give up his authority that easily. He met the man’s gaze steadily, not even blinking.

Quackity let go of his hand after a few tense moments, stepping back with a nod. “I’m glad my men are in capable hands, Wilbur.”

Phil skirted around both men, placing an arm around Quackity’s shoulders. “This way, Quackity. We’ll take you around the village, and you can introduce yourself to everyone else once you’re there.”

Quackity’s grin turned a little bit more relaxed as he realized he would be able to talk to the people himself. He let himself be led along by Philza, appropriately complimenting the island as the chief boasted about his home.

Wilbur followed behind them, keeping an eye on Quackity’s hands. Every time the man’s hands would stray too close to one of the knives in his belt, Wilbur would make a noise behind them, and Quackity would glance behind him with his weapon forgotten.

As soon as they reached the center of the village, Wilbur saw Quackity’s face light up at the sight of the stage set up for him. The trapper moved out of Phil’s hold and stepped toward the stage, casting a backward glance at the chief. “May I?”

Phil’s eye twitched, but he nodded. “Go ahead, the platform is all yours.”

Quackity leapt onto the stage, looking around at all the Vikings who were starting to crowd around him. He clapped his hands together and began his welcoming speech, but Wilbur wasn’t paying attention.

Wilbur craned his head over the sea of helmets, looking for a familiar head of blond hair. He spotted Tommy in the back of the crowd, watching Quackity with open hostility. Wilbur made eye contact with him, and Tommy shook his head, clearly upset with the trappers' presence.

Wilbur made his way through the crowd to Tommy. Thankfully, all of the Vikings were too enraptured by the spectacle on the platform to notice him.

“This guy’s a load of bullshit,” Tommy muttered as Wilbur stood beside him. “And he’s ugly.”

“Definitely ugly,” Wilbur agreed, glancing around to make sure no one was watching. “Look, Tommy, we need to—”

The loud clang of a metal cage hitting the platform interrupted Wilbur, and the brothers looked up to see Quackity’s men heaving a huge crate onto the platform.

“This right here!” Quackity yelled, banging a fist on the bars of the cage. “This could hold a *Skrill*. Made of the finest, purest iron man could forge. We have ten of these! I’m sure it would be useful for your...dilemma.”

Wilbur and Tommy exchanged a worried look. “Tommy, I need to tell you something. We need to get out of here.”

Tommy snorted. “I know, I’ll be hiding in the woods while these insufferable pricks are sharing our air.”

Wilbur shook his head, grabbing Tommy’s sleeve. “No, we need to speak privately. Come on.”

He tugged Tommy away from the crowd slowly, making sure no one was paying attention to him. Once they were safely hidden behind a house, out of sight of the crowd, they made a dash for the treeline.

Neither one of them sensed a single eye watching them leave.

“Alright, Will. What was *so* important?” Tommy demanded, crossing his arms as he sat down on the grass.

Wilbur rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly, trying to find the safest words for his idea. “I’ve been thinking...a lot,” he started, looking around the forest. “About the trappers, the dragons, and us.”

Tommy raised an eyebrow but said nothing, simply watching Wilbur struggle for the right words.

“With the trappers here, the dragons are in danger. Henry, his brothers, Sally, they could all be captured!”

“Well, not Henry, he’s too smart to be—”

“And,” Wilbur continued, ignoring how annoyed Tommy looked at being interrupted. “What about us? Consorting with dragons and all, why, we’d be killed on the spot! We’d be marked as traitors!”

Tommy stood up abruptly at that, shock flooding over his expression. “What the fuck, Wilbur?”

“I’m right!” Wilbur cried, throwing his hands in the air. “They’d never accept us again!”

“So what is your bright idea for fixing that?”

“We escape,” Wilbur whispered, glancing around again even though he knew he wouldn’t be overheard. “We leave with our dragons, and we don’t come back.”

Tommy blinked. “That is the *stupidest* fucking idea I’ve ever heard.”

Wilbur stared at him incredulously. Of all people, he thought Tommy would *definitely* be on his side. He knew the risks just as well as Wilbur did; he should be able to see that this is the only option for them.

“Tommy,” he started slowly, speaking to the young Viking like he was a child. “If we stay here, we die.”

“Not if we aren’t idiots!” Tommy countered. “We can hide the dragons while the trappers are here, and then when they leave, we can go back to normal.”

“That won’t *work*,” Wilbur hissed. “These trappers look like they’d do a bit more than sit and twiddle their thumbs while waiting for the dragons to come to *them!* They’d search the island, and they’d find the Terror Tree, and Sally’s lake, and—”

“Wilbur.”

Tommy put a hand on Wilbur’s shoulder, giving him a reassuring squeeze. His eyes had hope in them, hope that they’d be okay. It was so naive and fantastical, so *childish*, that Wilbur wanted to believe it, too. He wanted to think that everything would turn out in their favor, even if the odds were stacked against them.

But Wilbur hadn’t been hopeful for a long time, and he wasn’t going to start now.

He turned away from Tommy, taking some deep breaths. He wasn't going to be able to convince his brother if he was angry, that would just make his idea seem more unreasonable.

"Even if they did find out, which they *won't*, surely Phil would see reason," Tommy remarked. His voice had that echo of confidence to it that Wilbur wished he had right now. "Phil wouldn't hurt his kids, y'know. We're different."

Wilbur whirled on Tommy, jabbing a finger into the boy's face. "You aren't *special*," he sneered, getting so close to Tommy that the young Viking took a few nervous steps back. "You are *one* person."

"Wilbur, we're family—"

"Do you think that fucking matters?" Wilbur asked, venom dripping off of every word. He was being horrible, he knew that, but he *had* to make Tommy see his point. "Do you think that makes you *better*?"

"Will—"

"If push came to shove, would Phil choose us or the village?" Wilbur screamed, inwardly wincing as he saw Tommy's face pale. "Two children or the rest of his people, Tommy. Which one?"

Tommy stared at him with an unreadable expression. Then he turned away and took a few steps forward, his hands tightly clenched at his sides.

"Do you think he would choose us, Tom?" Wilbur whispered. He meant to sound mocking, but his words came out with a tinge of hope. Hope that *maybe* Tommy's fantasies weren't fantasies after all. That *maybe* Phil might—

"When do we leave?"

And just like that, any flicker of hope left in Wilbur's mind was blown out like a stubborn candle.

"I apologize, I don't know what's gotten into him lately," Phil muttered, wringing his hands behind his back.

Quackity shrugged, looking around for Wilbur. "It's fine, he's probably a busy man."

Wilbur took a deep breath and strolled around the corner, hoping he looked stressed enough. Well, he was, but not for the reasons they needed to know. "Gods, I'm so sorry, Tommy and I had an emergency that needed to be dealt with."

Phil just sighed. "It's fine, Will. As long as everything is taken care of."

Quackity studied him, drumming his fingers on the hilt of his sword. "I saw you and the blond one running off to the woods during my speech. What was so important there?"

Shit.

"Ah, Tommy thought he saw traces of a large dragon on the outskirts of the forest," Wilbur hurriedly replied, inwardly cringing at the way Quackity's eyes flashed at the hesitation in his answer. If only this trapper wasn't so observant. That would solve so many of Wilbur's problems, but *no*, nothing could go his way.

"What did you find?" Phil asked, his hand straying to his trusty battleaxe.

"Nothing, nothing. Just a false alarm."

Phil nodded, satisfied with the update. “Alright, then. Could you lead Quackity here to his lodgings?”

“Of course,” Wilbur responded, wanting to do anything but that.

Phil gave them a wave as he walked away, and Wilbur really wished he was the one heading home instead.

Quackity looked at him expectantly, and Wilbur stifled a sigh before leading the way. “You’ll be staying in one of our finest homes, of course,” he remarked, gesturing to one of the houses in front of them. “Multiple bedrooms for your crew to rest in and a fully stocked firewood pile. If you ever run out, let me or my father know, and we’ll make sure you are supplied with whatever—”

“You’re a strange one,” Quackity interrupted, paying no attention to the prime real estate Wilbur was trying to show off. “You’re dodgy, and you look like you’d rather be anywhere else in the world. Why is that?”

Wilbur shook his head with a forced smile. “I don’t know what you’re talking about there. I’m doing my duty for my village, and I couldn’t be happier to serve.”

Quackity stared at him for a moment, and then he hummed quietly in response. He obviously didn’t believe Wilbur, but he didn’t press any further, either.

Wilbur escorted him to the front door of the house, grateful that the rest of the walk over had been entirely silent. Quackity seemed to be favoring his right leg, the only visible sign of the battle Wilbur had witnessed a few days ago.

Wilbur couldn’t help but feel smug about the fact that the brave rider had left a lasting impression. He had no idea who she was, but he respected her. Not just for bashing this particular trapper, but that was a strong reason.

“Alright, you should be all set up. If you need anything at all, let...” Wilbur trailed off as he caught a glimpse of familiar gold and blue scales. *Gods, Sally, please not now.*

“What? What’s wrong?” Quackity demanded, pushing Wilbur aside so he could see whatever the man was looking at. After finding nothing out of the ordinary, he turned to glare at Wilbur. “You know, you’re really fucking suspicious.”

“What are you suggesting?” Wilbur shot back, glancing around to see if he had just imagined Sally being there.

“Stop fucking *looking* everywhere!” Quackity cried, pulling Wilbur away from where he stood and pinning him against the wall. He flipped over his eyepatch, and Wilbur visibly winced at the sight of the mangled eye socket. The eye had been completely gouged out, and a thick scar ran from his temple to his cheekbone, showing the path of whatever weapon had brutalized his face.

“You wanna know how I got these scars?” Quackity hissed, clearly enjoying Wilbur’s discomfort.

Wilbur blinked. “Um...no?”

“*Too bad,*” Quackity growled, his lip curling into that sick imitation of a smile. “Because I think you need to know.”

Quackity started rambling about a man he knew he couldn’t trust, and how he had correctly guessed that this acquaintance wasn’t a good asset. Wilbur’s eyes strayed away from Quackity, though, and he tuned the man out. To his horror, Sally was perched on the roof of the house across from where he was.

As soon as she saw that Wilbur was pinned against a wall, she bared her teeth and began to stalk towards them, ready to protect her rider.

Quackity finally noticed that Wilbur's attention was elsewhere. "For the love of the gods, what the *fuck* are you looking at?" he screamed, whipping around to find an angry dragon in his face.

Quackity paled, and Wilbur inwardly groaned. *So we're doing this now, then.* "Dragon attack!" he called, shoving Quackity out of the way. "Go get help!"

The trapper stared at him for a moment before nodding and running away, calling for help. Wilbur snorted as the man left him to the mercy of the dragon. He turned to Sally and rubbed her snout. "Good girl," he whispered.

Wilbur threw all of his weapons to the ground, mussing up his hair as he tried to make himself look like a wreck. "Alright, Sal, lift me up."

Sally gently bit into his cloak, carrying him up into the sky. Wilbur began pretending to squirm, yelling at the dragon as she "kidnapped" him. Sally gave him an unimpressed look that almost made him laugh, but he refused to break character.

"*Wilbur!*"

Phil stood below him, aiming a spear at Sally. He looked horrified, and Wilbur nearly abandoned the plan right then and there.

"Sorry, Dad," he whispered. He looked up at Sally, humming a note he knew would reassure her. "To the woods, Sal."

Sally flew away from the panicked village, and Wilbur's heart stopped at the pained cry Phil let out. He sounded *broken*.

Once Wilbur landed in the woods, he stumbled into Sally's chest and hugged her tightly, fighting back a flood of tears. He couldn't back out of this now, but the sound of Phil's devastated voice wouldn't stop echoing through his mind.

Tommy skidded into the clearing, his little herd of Terrible Terrors close behind. "You said *a couple days*, Will!" he exclaimed, his face red from running all the way here. "Not *now!*"

"Plan changed," Wilbur sniffed, letting go of Sally to face Tommy.

Tommy's face drained of its fury. "Are you okay?"

Wilbur's fists clenched at his sides. There really was no other way out. He'd set his fate in stone, and the consequences would be even worse if he gave up now.

"I'm fine. Let's go."

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

I have returned!! I'm back after my break and I'm ready to write some more. Very short chap today, but trust me, it's worth it. Enjoy!!

Wilbur hadn't actually planned this far ahead. He thought he would've had at least another couple of days to think it over, but Sally had thrown a wrench in the plan.

Tommy was riding behind Wilbur, carrying a sleepy Henry in his arms. The Terror had flown alongside them for a few hours, but it had grown tired of trying to keep up with Sally's pace. Now, it occasionally licked the back of Wilbur's neck for some reason.

“So...are we gonna talk about this?”

Wilbur glanced behind with a sigh. “What is there to talk about?”

Tommy shrugged as if he didn't care, but his expression was serious. “Oh, you know, maybe where we're going? Why we left so soon? *Why we're leaving in the first place?*”

“I don't know where we're going—”

“Fucking *great*, that is.”

Wilbur rubbed the bridge of his nose tiredly. “Just...can you give me a moment?”

“You’ve had several hours, but sure man. Do whatever you need to do.”

Tommy wasn’t wrong. They’d been flying over the open ocean with no real plan for hours now, and even Sally was beginning to get antsy. She kept swerving and looking around for a place to land, glancing up at Wilbur every so often for direction. She could fly for twice as long if she needed to, but it was cruel to make her tire herself out just because Wilbur was horrible at thinking ahead.

Wilbur glanced up at the sky, noting the position of the sun. They were heading due east, and Wilbur could think of only one place that was in this direction.

“Alright, I know where we’re going,” he announced, steering Sally down to the ocean’s surface.

“*Finally,*” Tommy groaned, shifting around behind Wilbur. “Dragon riding is *not* for me, Will. I’m going to walk funny for *weeks*.”

Wilbur snorted, and then he shivered as Henry licked his neck again. “Can you tell your gods damned lizard to keep his tongue to himself?”

Sally was ecstatic to see her island again, doing flips and twirls in the air that made Tommy shriek. She did a little dance when she touched down, prancing on the soft grass and letting out a happy trill.

Tommy slid off of her and stumbled on the ground, holding Henry close to his chest. “I’m gonna fucking hurl,” he threatened weakly, holding onto a nearby tree for support.

Henry scrambled out of Tommy's grasp as the Viking pretended to retch, scurrying around to explore the new land. Sally watched with muted interest, studying the Terror with a watchful gaze. It was like she was supervising him or making sure he wouldn't harm her precious island.

Wilbur walked over to Tommy and clapped him on the back, making the boy sputter and tip forward. "Alright Tommy, that's enough."

Tommy playfully glared at him, jabbing a finger into Wilbur's chest. "I could've *died* up there, Will," he muttered, fighting to keep a smile off of his face. "Could've just died and fallen into the ocean. What would you do without me?"

"Crash and burn, I reckon," Wilbur replied with a grin, turning away to look at the island.

"Now what?" Tommy asked, stepping up beside Wilbur. "Lay low here...forever?"

"I guess so," Wilbur murmured. The reality of his escape was setting in as the sun dipped below the horizon, and their future was as clear as the fog in the air. *What next?* Wilbur asked himself, knowing that he couldn't answer that. He'd dragged Tommy away from his home with little reason other than "for the dragons".

Tommy screeched as Sally picked up Henry in her mouth, running over to scold the dragon. Wilbur watched him go, swallowing his uncertainty. He was the son of one of the greatest chiefs alive; he was born to lead.

This was his moment to lead. This was his moment to be decisive.

With that thought in mind, he followed Tommy, chuckling at how the boy was jumping up and down to try and reach Henry.

"Sal, don't be a bully. Drop the dragon," Wilbur called, moving to stand next to Tommy.

“Your dragon is incredibly unpoggers,” Tommy remarked, crossing his arms over his chest.

“What the Hel is ‘unpoggers’?” Wilbur asked incredulously, giving Tommy a curious glance.

Tommy stood straighter, clearing his throat as if he was about to educate Wilbur on a very serious topic. “To be unpoggers is...well, it’s being not poggers, Will.”

Wilbur blinked and shook his head, wisely choosing not to question it. Tommy made up words all the time, and Wilbur had long since given up trying to understand any of them. He had his own little language, and Wilbur was fine with that.

Although, he was almost certain Tommy had just insulted Sally.

“Be nice,” Wilbur eventually settled for, patting Sally’s shoulder. The dragon dropped Henry unceremoniously, letting the Terror fall to the ground with a crashing sound. She licked her teeth and looked to Wilbur for approval, and Wilbur held back a smile as he nodded. “Good girl.”

“She is *not* a good girl!” Tommy cried indignantly, scooping Henry into his arms and glaring daggers at Sally. “She could have hurt Henry!”

“He’s *fine*,” Wilbur replied, giving the small Terror a scratch between the horns. “See? Right as rain.”

Henry gave a pitiful squawk as he snuggled into Tommy’s arms, blowing a feeble plume of smoke out of his nose. Wilbur waved the smoke away and narrowed his eyes at the dragon before turning to Sally. “Where do we go now, Sal?”

“Yeah, sure. Ask the murderous, bloodthirsty dragon what the next—” Tommy’s biting words were cut off with a loud shriek as Sally gently swiped at him with her tail, huffing in

amusement. “Control your...your *lizard!*” Tommy gasped, struggling to find a witty insult.

Sally began stalking away, and Wilbur beckoned to the grounded Viking. “Now’s not the time for a nap, Toms.”

“*She literally fucking—*”

Wilbur turned away and chuckled before jogging to catch up with Sally, who obviously wasn’t going to wait for them.

“Oi! I’m not done with you!”

Sally led them to the center of the island, where their jaws dropped.

It was late in the evening by now, and the forest was incredibly dark with the thick canopy. But Sally’s nest was surrounded by *light*. Mosses that glowed deep purples, blues, and greens covered the nearby trees and rocks, shimmering as a faint breeze stirred them. Luminescent bugs flew all around them, shining like tiny stars that twirled in front of their very eyes.

Tommy cupped his palms and reached out as a particularly large star-bug landed in his hands. He brought it up to his face and stared at it with childish wonder, a small smile on his face.

Wilbur was equally as enchanted, spinning around to see everything he possibly could. The star-bugs twinkled as they flew past, disappearing into the dark background before appearing once again as a ball of light. Wilbur crouched down to look at some of the glowing moss, extending a hand to brush over the tiny mushrooms embedded in the flora.

Sally watched them both with a satisfied expression, stalking over to her old nest. She curled up inside of the amber ball and watched the Vikings play with the star-bugs, lifting her head

every once in a while when one of them got too loud.

“Wilbur, this is so cool! What are these things?” Tommy yelled, running past Wilbur to dash through a cloud of the star-bugs. The bugs scattered as he ran through their group, flying away like a fire’s sparks.

“I have no idea,” Wilbur breathed, nearly speechless with awe. The forest had been beautiful when he’d first explored it in the daytime, but now...now it was stunning. Colors he didn’t realize existed flared up all around him, illuminating the woods with a soft, ocean-colored glow.

He had no words for it. It was otherworldly, just like the flight he’d taken with Sally just a few days ago. He’d stepped into a new realm the moment he’d met the dragon, that was for sure.

After they’d had their fun with the lights, Wilbur and Tommy eventually settled down for the night. Tommy and Henry laid down under a large tree, nestling themselves in its tangle of roots. Wilbur joined Sally in her nest, placing himself in a position where he could see Tommy.

Sally covered him with hay and hummed something like a lullaby, setting her head down to rest. With one final look at Tommy, Wilbur let his eyes shut as well.

He fell asleep with a smile on his face.

It felt like only a few moments before he woke up to Sally leaving the nest. She shook some straw off of her wings before creeping out, barely glancing behind her as Wilbur got up to follow.

The star-bugs had calmed down, and they perched in the trees and grass as they twinkled, silently speaking in a language Wilbur wished he could understand. They flew away as Sally lumbered past, making offended hissing noises as they were interrupted.

Sally didn't seem to care though, and she kept moving forward. Wilbur stayed close, looking around the dimly illuminated forest for any signs of danger. Sally seemed to be doing the same thing, cocking her head this way and that.

Wilbur kept his breathing and steps quiet. Sally had the best hearing of any living creature Wilbur knew of, but he didn't want to risk disorienting her.

They both turned at the sound of a scuffle to their left, and Sally growled as a silhouette became visible through the foliage. She opened her mouth, prepared to spit amber at the enemy, but she stopped when a person stepped out of the trees.

The newcomer was covered from head to toe in some sort of dark red armor, with white spikes accenting the shoulders, gloves, and the mask. The mask, if you could even call it that, was either shaped like a dragon's skull...or it *was* a skull. It was spiked down the center, and two sturdy horns curled around either side of the terrifying disguise. A long pink braid stuck out behind the skull mask, draped over one of the stranger's shoulders. Gems and colored ropes were weaved into the braid, shimmering faintly in the light of the forest.

Wilbur saw a pair of eyes widen through the sockets of the mask, and the stranger pulled a sword from their belt.

Wilbur grabbed Sally's snout spike and pulled her away as he ran from the armed stranger. “*Shit.*”

“Hey!” the stranger called, and Wilbur could hear them chasing after him. “Get back here!”

Wilbur dashed into the clearing to find Tommy pinned against a tree by a Monstrous Nightmare. The Viking was frozen in place as the dragon glared at him, and Henry was valiantly trying to blow tiny plumes of fire into the Nightmare's face.

Their pursuer crashed through the undergrowth behind Wilbur, and they whistled to the Nightmare. The dragon swatted at Tommy, and the Viking fell to the ground, unmoving.

“Tommy!” Wilbur screamed, trying to run over to the fallen boy. Sally grabbed him and held him close, her talons slicing into Wilbur’s clothes with how firm her grip was. She flared her wings and ear fins as she hissed at the offending dragon and attacker, lashing her tail as they tried to get closer.

She opened her mouth to attempt shooting them again, but the armored attacker reached into a pouch on their belt and threw some sort of dart at her.

To Wilbur’s horror, the dart landed in her neck, and she blinked before swaying from side to side, shaking her head sleepily. She fell to the ground in a heap of gold and blue scales, breathing deeply in some sort of forced slumber.

Wilbur had barely opened his mouth to call her name when the armored attacker descended, bringing the hilt of their sword down on Wilbur’s head.

He thought he heard a slight gasp before his vision turned black.

A cold splash of water woke Wilbur up, gasping and spluttering as a bucket was thrown to the side.

He stood immediately, swaying slightly with his sudden movement. He spun around the room, dismayed to find out that he had absolutely no idea where he was.

The room he was in was extremely dark, and he could barely see his hands in front of his face. But as he moved around, things began to stir in the shadows. One moment, he was certain he was alone in this space, and the next, he saw hundreds of eyes staring him down.

A faint blue glow appeared in the distance, revealing the silhouettes of dragons of all shapes and sizes surrounding him. Most of them were dragons he had never seen in his life, strange creatures with extra spikes, tails, or even *heads*.

Worse still, every one of them looked extremely hostile.

They were beginning to creep closer to him, and a low growl started echoing around the room. Several of them reached out to nip at him, making him twist around to try and avoid their sharp teeth. Others tried wrapping their tails around his legs, attempting to draw him closer to their gaping maws.

Wilbur was quickly lost in a sea of talons and scales, and no matter how much he fought against them, they never seemed to completely let go. After a few minutes of the constant prodding and grabbing, Wilbur realized they were *curious*, not bloodthirsty.

After all, he was a new visitor. They wanted to check him out and make sure he was safe. Wilbur understood that, at least, but it didn't make the neverending touch any less annoying.

“Sal—Sally!” Wilbur shrieked, ripping his cloak away from a dragon who clearly didn’t understand the meaning of personal space. “Sally, help!”

The blue glow behind the dragons grew brighter, and Wilbur could make out the shouts of people over the growling. And then an almighty roar shook the very room they were in, and Wilbur nearly fainted with relief. “Sal!”

Another ear-splitting roar shook the ground, and Wilbur saw the form of his dragon speeding towards him. Sally landed in front of him and screeched at the other dragons, making them cringe away from her fury. She scooped Wilbur to her chest with her tail, then formed a curtain with her wings to hide him.

Wilbur chuckled as Sally concernedly checked over him, twisting her long neck to allow her to see every inch of him. “I’m okay, Sally. I’m okay.”

Sally huffed once she had looked him over, raising her head over her wings to hiss at something.

Wilbur peeked his head through her wings, watching the armored person from before come closer with another. This new arrival looked much more elegant than Wilbur's attackers, and they held themselves proudly in their dark purple armor. They had a large black hat on instead of a mask, and a thick veil hid their face from view. Unlike Red, whose armor had plenty of chips and scratches, Purple's armor had no visible damage at all.

They were whispering something to each other, speaking in tones quiet enough that Wilbur couldn't even make out what their voices sounded like. They suddenly looked up at him, and Wilbur ducked behind the wings again. He scrambled to get his knife out of his belt, shakily holding it out in case they decided to attack him again.

Sally's growling grew louder and louder until she stopped, lowering her head. Wilbur could hear her sniffing at something, and then she huffed and opened her wings.

"No, no, *Sal*—"

Wilbur clammed up as Purple crouched in front of him, taking off one of their gloves. They extended a hand, nimbly moving past Wilbur's knife. Wilbur expected them to shake his hand, or grab him by the shirt.

The hand reached up to cradle his face softly, rubbing a thumb over his cheek. Purple tilted his head to the side and ran a finger down his neck, tracing a long scar Wilbur had had since his mother was taken. A dragon had snatched Techno from right beside Wilbur, and one of its claws had cut into his neck.

His mother had tried to save him, but the dragon took two lives that night.

Purple gave a small gasp and turned to Red, nodding emphatically. They took off their hat to reveal a dark-haired woman with tears in her eyes, smiling at Wilbur like he was something precious to her. "It's *you*."

"Me?" Wilbur whispered, lowering his knife. "What do you mean *me*? Do I know you?"

Purple shook her head with a laugh that sounded like a sob, turning away to look at Red again. “No...you were only a baby.”

Red crouched down as well, and they took off their skull mask, letting it fall to the ground with a clatter. The man smiled as Wilbur’s eyes widened, a smile so familiar to Wilbur that it could’ve been his own. Identically lopsided, with one side of the mouth curling up more than the other.

“*Techno?*”

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

hi hello yep i am here and alive! Sickness got the best of me but! I have returned to write for you all. Enjoy!

At the age of four, Wilbur and Technoblade were inseparable.

It was bad enough that they looked identical. Their parents could tell them apart only by how they acted. Wilbur was louder and the leader of the pair, while Techno would quietly follow.

The village was enamoured by them and enabled the pair's shenanigans. Techno, for instance, had a habit of climbing onto roofs and sitting on the edge, just dangling his legs over the heads of Vikings as he watched the sea. Wilbur would eventually manage to scramble up next to him, and there they would stay for hours, entertained by the clouds and the distant sea.

They were gifted with weapons, even as toddlers. Techno was especially good with balance, and the Vikings would whisper about what a promising warrior he would become. Silent and deadly, that's what they predicted.

Silent and absent was what they got.

The boys were separated for the first time on a night of a brutal dragon attack, though not willingly. A fearsome dragon had broken into the chief's home, headed straight for the young ones hidden behind a table. Their mother had tried in vain to protect them, but another dragon had followed the first and had made short work of her. The boys were left to fend for themselves, and Techno valiantly stood in front of Wilbur, screaming as loud as his little lungs could at the dragon.

The dragon had not been impressed. With one swipe of its sharp talons, Techno was snatched off of the ground and flown away before Wilbur could blink.

That was the last time Wilbur had seen his brother...until now.

“*Techno?*” Wilbur repeated, staring at the man with wide eyes. “It—it *can’t* be. You’re dead.”

Techno snorted, extending a hand to help Wilbur to his feet. “Didn’t you know? Technoblade never dies.”

“I—”

Before he could respond, Techno and the woman started off toward the exit of the cave, leaving Wilbur and Sally with the curious dragons once more. “Wait!”

The armoured pair paid him no mind, already jumping over the rocks that blocked the entryway. Wilbur ran after them with Sally close behind, narrowly dodging dragons that tried to step in front of his path.

“You can’t just *say* something like that and *run away!*” Wilbur cried, struggling to clamber over the rocks. Sally gave him a push from behind, knocking him over the rocks and onto the ground on the other side. “You have to give some sort of explanation, dammit!”

The passageway Wilbur was in now was covered in thick blue ice, making him skid this way and that as he tried to chase after his lost family. The rocks were smooth and covered with moss, making his trek even more difficult as he struggled to find purchase on the slippery surfaces. Some sort of light was coming through the ice on one side, with small cracks in the blue sheets allowing the light to stream through.

After a few minutes, Wilbur finally caught a glimpse of red armour up ahead. Techno—if that's even who this man was—was waiting for him with an amused grin, as if Wilbur's struggle was *funny*.

“Can you at least tell me where we are?” Wilbur demanded, catching up to the mysterious pair at last.

The woman in purple snickered. “Of course, of course,” she said, stepping to the side. “Welcome to the Sanctuary.”

Wilbur held a hand over his eyes as he stepped forward, waiting for his vision to adjust to the sudden brightness in front of him. Once he could see, his jaw dropped.

In front of him was possibly the most breathtaking scene he had ever witnessed. A giant cave was before his very eyes, the thick ice from before encapsulating the space in a bluish globe that seemed to reflect light from every angle. A massive pillar of stone rose from the centre of the cave to the ceiling, supporting the glassy roof above. Small shrubs and trees grew from cracks in the stone, covering the pillar in every shade of green imaginable.

A grand lake lay at the bottom of the cave, shimmering in the filtered sunlight like a pile of gemstones. Wilbur could see dark shadows swimming beneath the surface, and a dragon's head came up for air before diving back under. Beside the lake was a cluster of smaller pools on circular shelves of rock, each one hosting several smaller dragons that frolicked in the sparkling water. Waterfalls from all over the cave fed the lake and the pools, each one featuring rainbows reflecting off of the cascading water.

Above the water were grassy banks that sloped towards the lake's surface, graced with vines that brushed the water. Small flowers dotted the lush greenery, covering the landscape with bright bursts of colour.

The stunning scenery alone would have made Wilbur feel faint, but nothing could have prepared him for the *dragons*.

Dragons of every shape, size, and colour flew around the massive pillar, and even more were perched on the smaller pillars and ground below. He couldn't name half of the majestic creatures, let alone imagine fighting them.

There was just so much to see, and not nearly enough time for his mind to comprehend what was happening. Wilbur took a step forward into the Sanctuary, trying to look at every inch of the globe. A part of him he hadn't even realised was empty felt full, and he never wanted to let that feeling go.

The moss underfoot turned spongy and soft as he continued forward, making him sink slightly into the ground. It didn't even matter though, for he felt weightless where he stood. He was so lost in the wonder of this place that he didn't notice Techno standing at his side, fidgeting nervously.

“Do you like it?”

Wilbur gave a start at the timidity in Techno's voice. It was as if the man had thought that such a fantastical place *could* be unlikeable. “Techno...it's—this is—there's no words for how *wonderful* this is.”

Techno visibly relaxed, the nervousness in his eyes fading into joy. “I didn't know what you'd think of it,” he admitted, looking away to gaze at the Sanctuary in all of its beauty. “I didn't think that you'd...well, that you'd even *tolerate* dragons.”

Wilbur's awed expression dimmed for a moment, but then he grinned as Sally came into view. “Well, I don't think I'd keep her around unless I liked 'em a little bit.”

Techno smiled in reply, slowly extending a hand to Sally. “May I?”

Wilbur nodded, giving them some space. Techno tapped Sally on the side of her neck, making her fall to the ground with a sigh. He kept one hand rubbing her neck while he examined her with the other, running careful fingers over her fins and scales as he mumbled to himself.

Techno was a far cry from the boy Wilbur barely remembered. He was shorter than Wilbur, but he made up for that with pure muscle. He looked similar to Phil now, with the same sort of build and determined set of his jaw. But below all of that, he was still Wilbur's twin, the other half of a whole. They had the same smile, the same expressive eyes, and the same nose that looked more crooked the longer you stared at it. And they both had scars from battles past.

Techno's face was littered with more visible cuts than Wilbur's, but he had the same tension that any warrior did. The sort of tension that meant they were ready for battle at any moment. Wilbur's expression darkened, though, as he realised the real difference between them.

They may have the same scars from the same battles, but they were always on opposite sides of the battlefield.

Techno had probably been aiding the dragons for most of his life, while Wilbur had been actively destroying them without a second thought. It was a troubling idea, but at least they were on the same side now.

The last thing Wilbur wanted was to fight with the brother he had just found.

A soft hand rested on his shoulder, drawing him out of his thoughts. The woman in purple stood behind him, watching Techno with a fond expression. "He's waited for this moment for years, you know," she whispered, giving Wilbur a knowing look. There was something so *familiar* in her eyes, but Wilbur couldn't place it. "We both have."

Guilt coursed through Wilbur as he struggled to place a name to the face that was in front of him. "I'm so sorry...but who are you?"

Countless emotions flashed over the lady's face as she took in Wilbur's words until she looked close to tears. She gave him a watery smile and shook her head, pulling him in for a tight hug. "I'm sorry, Wilbur," she breathed, running a hand through his hair in a way that pulled at Wilbur's heart and memories.

“Why?” Wilbur asked, patting her on the back as he tried to figure out a way to stop this stranger’s tears. He shouldn’t have said anything, this was a complete mistake—

“Because I must have been a horrible mother if my own son can’t recognize me.”

Wilbur froze, his heart catching in his throat.

It was one thing for his brother to be alive, but he had *watched* his mother die. He would never, ever forget her pained scream as a dragon’s claw tore through her shoulder. Even as a child, he had known that that had been a fatal injury. The amount of blood that Phil had to scrub out of the walls afterwards had meant a sure death.

His mother had died. She was long dead.

So why did her hands feel so warm?

Wilbur gasped a shaky breath as tears flooded over his face, his mind reeling as it tried to comprehend what was happening.

“You’re here,” he managed to choke out, his voice barely audible over the pounding in his chest.

His mother’s arms tightened around him as she nodded furiously, smiling despite the tears coursing down her cheeks. “I’m *right* here, Wilbur. I’m right here.”

They held each other for an eternity that seemed far too short, holding on like they were scared the other would disappear. It was an awkward embrace, what with Kristin’s thick armour and Wilbur’s height, but they made it feel like the best hug of their lives.

When they finally released, Kristin stepped back and gave him a once over. “You’ve grown a bit,” she observed with a grin, wiping the tears from her eyes.

“That or you’ve shrunk,” Wilbur laughed as he rubbed his cheek dry. “I hear dragon riding is bad for your back.”

“Boy, I’ll have you know my back is as strong as an iron rod.”

Wilbur turned away from his mother to see Techno watching their exchange with something that looked like envy, but the look disappeared so quickly that Wilbur might’ve imagined it.

Techno walked around to clap Wilbur on the back, leading him towards another opening in the cave’s wall. “Let’s get you settled in. Your head has to be pounding right now, I’m sure.”

“It’s not really—”

“You’re either in denial or on an adrenaline high, Wilbur. Just trust me on this one.”

Unfortunately, Techno was right. Wilbur’s head had begun to throb by the time they’d made it to where Kristin and Techno lived.

There had been a crudely carved staircase in the hallway Techno had led them down that had seemed to spiral towards the ceiling for hours, making Wilbur dizzy as they continued to spin around and upwards.

The stairs eventually opened into a small cave covered in familiar blue moss. Sally, who had been quite disgruntled as she squoze herself up the narrow staircase, sniffed at the lichen curiously. It looked like the same kind from her own island, but slightly dimmer. Without a source of regular sunlight like Sally’s island had, Wilbur supposed, the glow just wouldn’t be that bright anymore.

They went deeper into the cave, following a well worn path through a maze of stalagmites. The path led to a large ledge overlooking the Sanctuary, rimmed with man made railings to ensure no accidents.

There was a large table in the centre of the room, and a cooking area with several cupboards and firepits rested right behind it. Sitting at the table, looking entirely unimpressed with this whole ordeal, was none other than Tommy.

“Tommy?” Wilbur cried, rushing to hug him. “Are you alright? Are you hurt?”

Tommy returned Wilbur’s embrace warmly, but when he let go he glared at Techno and Kristin. “It’s about *time*,” he spat, pushing Wilbur into the chair behind him. “You said you’d get him in a *timely fucking fashion*.”

Kristin and Techno exchanged an amused glance before heading off to the cooking area, clearly already familiar with Tommy’s attitude.

“You have to wait until the family reunion’s over, kid,” Techno grumbled as he passed, taking off his gauntlets with a sigh. He exited the room to finish removing his armour, but Kristin went straight to tending to the fire.

“Family reunions can happen where I can see them, thank you very much!” Tommy snapped in reply, taking a cool rag off of the table and handing it to Wilbur. “Wilbur, your family is a bunch of pricks.”

“Really?” Wilbur asked with a light grin. “How so?”

Tommy inhaled deeply as he began his treacherous tale. “First of all, your asshole brother had his dragon hit me into a tree! That’s already a red flag in any relationship. Then, when I woke up, they tried to knock me out again!”

“Because you wouldn’t stop swearin’ and screamin’ at us,” Techno called, entering the room with a much more welcoming outfit. It looked like a training outfit one a young Viking might wear during sword practice. He wore loose white tunic tucked into a colourful sash over warm trousers, an outfit perfect for activity.

“Whatever,” Tommy hissed, sending Techno a few rude hand gestures. “After I managed to win them over with my natural charm, I made them promise to bring you up here in one piece.”

“He threatened to bite us,” Kristin added helpfully, grinning as she chopped some root vegetables. “And kick us, give us ‘horrible, painful diseases’, and ruin our financial situation.”

“Which we don’t even *have*,” Techno muttered, pulling his braid into a loose bun.

“Yes, because you are poor, unfortunate *bitches*.”

“Tommy, don’t bite the hand that feeds you,” Wilbur warned, relishing the cool fabric on his face.

“I’ll bite whoever I want, thank you,” Tommy growled. “Especially the grimy hands of people who stole me and my brother away from our lovely vacation.”

“Brother?” Techno questioned, pausing in handing Kristin a pot.

“Yes. He was my brother first, actually, so you and your pink hair can fuck right off.”

“I...I’m *older* than you.”

“And I’m *better* than you.”

“Boys,” Kristin chided, nudging Techno’s shoulder lightly. “Play nice.”

“I refuse to be nice to such a violent person.”

Techno stared at Tommy, opening and closing his mouth as he tried to think of a way to respond. “I knocked you out *one* time because I thought you were a dragon trapper.”

“Or to such an obviously *blind* person.”

“What is your *problem*? ”

“That’s just Tommy for you,” Wilbur sighed, kicking Tommy under the table. “Phil adopted him after his parents died, so unfortunately he’s stuck with me.”

“Oi!”

“Relax, I don’t plan on getting rid of you yet.”

“*Yet*? ”

Kristin and Techno stared as the two bickered with equally sharp words. Wilbur glanced over to Techno again and swore he saw that hint of jealousy in his eyes again, but it vanished as soon as they made eye contact.

Kristin seemed to find it all incredibly endearing, and she certainly enabled Tommy to continue spouting curse words and insults at everyone in the room. She was grinning all the way through dinner, even though Techno just looked tired of Tommy already.

After they had all eaten their fill of vegetable stew, Kristin collected the dishes and asked Tommy to help her clean up. Tommy, who had clearly become very attached to the lady, immediately said yes.

“Seeing as I’m the only gentleman here, I suppose I have to, don’t I?”

“Oh, of course,” Kristin replied with a laugh. “Only the politest of men get to help me with the dishes.”

“How did you bear to live without me?” Tommy wondered aloud, snatching the bowls out of Kristin’s hands and whisking them away to the washing basin. He began humming loudly as he filled the basin with water, horribly off-key as always.

Techno’s eye twitched. “I’ll get Wilbur to his room,” he announced, taking Wilbur by the hand out of the dining area.

“I’m sure I could find my own way there, Techno,” Wilbur objected as he was dragged along.

“No, no. This place is, uh, very windy. You could get lost.”

Sally, who had been quietly observing everything up to this point, followed them with a huff. Her tail nearly knocked over several stalagmites, but she always drew back right before hitting the stone columns. She didn’t seem too fazed by the new sights and sounds, simply taking it all in stride as she accompanied Wilbur.

At least one of us isn’t freaking out, Wilbur thought. Unlike Sally, every new thing he saw made his heart skip a beat. The fact that his twin brother, who he’d thought dead for twenty long years, was holding his hand right now was enough to make his mind spin. All this new information was just a bit overwhelming.

Techno turned into a dark passageway, passing by several doors without hesitation. Perhaps Techno was right after all. He was definitely more certain in his path than Wilbur could have ever been on his own.

He finally stopped in front of a door larger than all the rest, hesitantly reaching out to open it.

Wilbur had known his brother for all of a few hours, but he was fairly sure that Techno wasn't usually an uncertain person. He seemed like the kind of man that had strong opinions and beliefs, and he would act on those with an equally firm resolution. Right now, for some reason, he looked like he doubted every twitch of his fingers.

Techno flung open the doors abruptly, startling Wilbur out of his thoughts. He stepped back to allow Wilbur through first, looking down at the floor as he did so. Wilbur tossed him a concerned glance before entering the room, Sally right on his heels.

The room was three times as large as Wilbur's bedroom. It was divided into two levels, one side for the bed and the other for a workspace. The bed was in a loft high above the ground, perched in a crudely carved shelf of rock. Beneath the loft was a slab of dark rock that had been polished like glass, and it probably weighed about as much as an entire ship.

Sprawled across the wall opposite the bed was a massive, detailed map of the lands surrounding the Sanctuary. Wilbur didn't recognize most of the islands, but there was one that looked like Sally's to the far west. Past that was a dagger embedded into the wall, striking directly into what Wilbur assumed to be his home island.

Beneath the map was a desk with books and charcoal pencils neatly stacked on top of it. The paper was yellowed and dry, and the pencils were probably brittle, but it looked like someone had put plenty of effort into this room at one point.

"Whose room is this?" Wilbur asked.

"Yours, now," Techno replied quietly, moving to stiffly stand beside Wilbur.

“This room had to have belonged to someone, though. It looks like it was carved out by hand!”

“It’s just a guest room for any travellers that happen to pass by,” Techno muttered, avoiding eye contact.

Wilbur was beginning to realise that Techno was a horrible liar. “No one’s come by in a long time, then.”

“You would be correct.”

Wilbur feigned a yawn, stretching his arms above his head. “I have had a *very* long day, you know. I think it’s time for me and Sally here to hit the hay, if you know what I mean.”

Techno’s eyes widened. “Yes, yeah, of course! I’ll, ah, leave you both alone for the night. I’m right down the hall if you need me.”

He backed out of the room and held the door like he was going to shut it, but he hesitated. Wilbur and Techno stared at each other for an uncomfortable moment, and then Techno swallowed and looked away. “I—I’m right down the hall if you want anything,” he repeated, finally shutting the door in farewell.

“What do you think got him so nervous?” Wilbur asked Sally as he undid his cloak. Sally snorted and rolled her eyes, stalking over to the black stone and curling up for sleep.

“Yeah, me neither,” Wilbur murmured, casting one last glance at the door before turning in for the night.

Apparently, some god had dictated that Wilbur could never get a full night’s sleep.

He woke up to the sound of a door closing, and curiosity washed over any trace of tiredness. He quietly climbed down his ladder, making sure not to wake Sally as he left the room.

The stone hallway was drafty and dark, only illuminated by the dimly glowing moss growing in crevices along the walls. Wilbur shivered and crossed his arms over his chest as he walked forward, wishing he'd thought to bring his cloak with him. He froze when he heard the sound of boots from up ahead, the noise echoing through the passageways growing fainter as the person walked away.

Wilbur, despite his chills, silently followed the sound of clicking heels. He had no idea where he was going, and the echo of distant footsteps was the only thing keeping him from getting lost in these catacombs. The person he was following passed the dining ledge and the entrance into the Sanctuary, instead pressing forwards on a path Wilbur had yet to go down. The hallway sloped upwards, and Wilbur soon found that he was stepping in a thin stream of water. Splashing from up ahead told him that it only got worse.

Grimacing to himself, he walked close to the wall in an attempt to avoid the stream of icy water that had probably formed this pathway in the first place. The stream grew wider the farther he went until there was no way to stop his thinly soled boots from getting soaked.

All of a sudden, the footsteps stopped. Wilbur froze, thinking he had been found out, but no one came down the dark hallway. He continued uphill until he found himself standing in the opening of a ledge close to the ceiling of the Sanctuary. A large pool of water lay beside the entrance, the overflow from the pond forming the stream Wilbur had just tread through.

At the edge of the ledge sat someone with a familiar head of pink hair. Techno had his knees drawn up to his chest as he watched over the sleeping Sanctuary. He looked like he was trying to make himself as small as possible, which was pretty hard when he had so much bulk to account for.

“Mom, I don’t want another lecture. I’m fine.”

Wilbur opened his mouth to respond, then he hesitated. Techno took that hesitation as an invitation to continue. “I *am* fine. I’m not scared of Wilbur, that’s not what this is at all. I

mean, did you see him? He's nothing to be scared of.”

Wilbur pursed his lips. He was *very* scary, thank you very much.

“I...I’m just worried that I won’t be enough, y’know? He probably expects so much of me, and I’m just a guy who sits in a big iceberg and writes things down. He’s grown up to be a leader and a warrior, and I’m none of those things.”

Wilbur took a step forward, reaching a hand out to Techno before reconsidering and drawing back.

“I know you don’t agree, you said that a million times before. Feelings are just...I dunno, this is just not something you can fix with one of your pep talks.”

Wilbur took a deep breath, tensing his entire body before taking another step forward and sitting next to Techno. “Feelings are very ‘I dunno’ sometimes.”

Techno stiffened as soon as he heard Wilbur, and Wilbur could hear his heart pounding in the tense silence that followed. He nearly expected Techno to stand up and leave, but Techno stayed exactly where he was. “Sorry, I—”

Wilbur waved him off. “Nothing to ‘pologise for,’ he whispered, crossing his legs and breathing in the night air. “Nighttime confessions are good shit.”

Techno hummed in agreement, moving to mirror Wilbur’s pose. They sat in slightly uncomfortable silence for a while, neither of them daring to even look at each other.

“Techno,” Wilbur started awkwardly, picking at the stone beneath him.

“Yeah?”

“Like...I *am* actually scary.”

“Gods above, you’re still in denial.”

Wilbur and Techno exchanged a smile, and the atmosphere became comfortable at last.

End Notes

o// Thank you for reading!

Feel free to leave comments, I love interaction :D

I hope you all enjoyed, and I hope to see you in the next update! (Which should be every Monday I hope) Take care!

Much platonic love,

Rose

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!